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April 2016 Japan's No.1 English Magazine [www.metropolisjapan.com](http://www.metropolisjapan.com)

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Photo by Thomas Beecher

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Photo by Rodgers Sonamura

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**Seven Up:** Play raises awareness on women's issues

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## IN FOCUS

The bright lights of Kushiro, port city of Hokkaido, from the observatory point of Yonemachi Park, by Matthew Fawcett



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# TO-DO LIST

Check full event listings in the WATCHLIST online!  
<http://metropolisjapan.com/watchlist>



## MARCH 18-APR 3 SAKANA FES IN TOKYO TOWER

Fish lovers rejoice! After garnering over 35,000 visitors last year, Nihon Sakana Matsuri returns to Tokyo Tower under a new name: "Sakana Fes." Now in its second year, the 17-day food festival will once again showcase seasonal fish from the seas around Japan, and visitors can indulge in delectable regional cuisines from all over the country. Given the sheer size of the festival, it's clear that Sakana Fes is no mere large-scale taste-tester. With its core tenet to promote Japanese food culture to the world, Sakana Fes is truly the cultural ambassador for the Japanese fish industry. The event will be divided across two sites—the "Eastern Sea" and the "Western Sea"—and fish aficionados can sate their appetites with seafood varieties spanning from Hokkaido all the way down to Kyushu. Head over to Tokyo Tower and send your taste buds on a trip around Japan! **Until Apr 3. Free admission (¥700 per food ticket).** 📍 Akabanebashi. <http://sakanafes.jp> (Japanese.)



## APR 9-MAY 5 BUNKYO AZALEA FESTIVAL

In Japan, spring is a season that highlights the beauty of intrinsence—and the azalea best encapsulates this uniquely Japanese concept. Bunkyo Azalea Festival captures the grace and essence of spring that has been cherished by the Japanese for centuries. Said to have been established by the legendary prince Yamato Takeru around two millennia ago, the historical Nezu Shrine is where the Emperor Meiji offered prayers for the nation's peace and security. Renowned for its beautiful, 300-year-old azalea garden of about 6,000 square meters, the shrine is home to over 100 different species of the flora, including rare varieties. Here, visitors can enjoy viewing a sea of over 3,000 azaleas, as well as peruse a series of festive stalls and an antique fair, plant fairs, and three *mikoshi* ("portable shrines") on display. **Nezu Shrine. Apr 9-May 5. ¥200.** 📍 Nezu. [www.nedujinja.or.jp](http://www.nedujinja.or.jp) (Japanese)

Yasuda Yukihiro, right-hand screen "Camp at Kisekawa" 1940/1941 Important Cultural Property, possession of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo



## MAR 23-MAY 15 YASUDA YUKIHIKO: A RETROSPECTIVE

Sandwiched between the turbulent Meiji and militaristic Showa eras, the Taisho Period (1912-1926) was the time when Japan saw a dynamic shift in public consciousness. It was during this era, when democracy had superceded oligarchy, that the artist Yukihiro Yasuda revolutionized art by drawing inspiration from Japan's historical past. Regarded as one of the founders of *nihonga*, Yasuda's works still carry a great impact not only on art but Japanese society in general. Long-term expats in Japan may even remember his work unknowingly when posting letters; during the 1980s, three of his artworks became postage stamps. This exhibition will showcase over 100 of his masterpieces, including never-before-seen works. **The National Museum of Modern Art Tokyo. Until May 15. Open 10am-5pm. ¥400-1,400. Tel: 03-5777-8600.** 📍 Otemachi. [www.moma.go.jp/english/am/exhibition/yasuda-yukihiro/](http://www.moma.go.jp/english/am/exhibition/yasuda-yukihiro/)



## APR 14 DAUGHTER

Just five years after their formation, U.K.-based indie folk trio Daughter have quickly moved beyond being just a local London favorite. The band made a name for themselves in the London music circle, and in 2012 headlined a 700-capacity show. After appearing on BBC One Radio and *The Late Show with David Letterman* the same year, the band released their debut album *If You Leave* in 2013, which landed at number 16 on the U.K. Top 100 chart. Haunting melodies and a moody atmosphere define the band's sound; underneath self-taught musician Elena Tonra's delicate vocals is Igor Haefeli's guitar establishing the soundscape, while Remi Aguilera keeps the music grounded with his impressively-refined drum beats. Daughter will perform tracks from their 2016 sophomore album, *Not To Disappear*. **Liquidroom. Apr 14, 7pm. ¥6,000.** 📍 Ebisu. <http://ohdaughter.com>

Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba. Ho! Ho! Ho! Merry Christmas: Battle of Easel Point - Memorial Project Okinawa



## UNTIL JULY 10 ROPPONGI CROSSING 2016

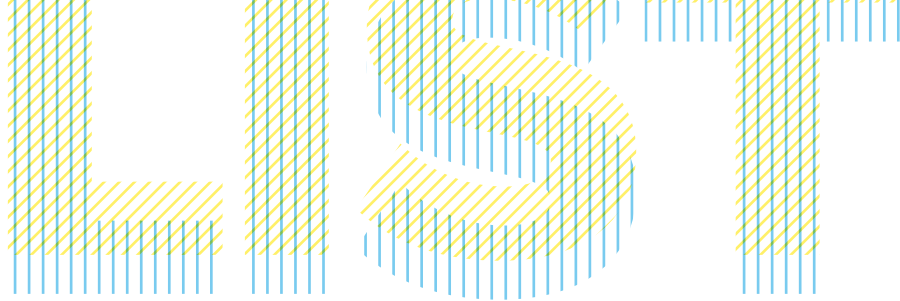
Staged every three years, Roppongi Crossing represents the Mori curators' take on the Japanese contemporary art scene. With "My Body, Your Voice" as the theme, this year's installment examines identities, gender, and the relationship between the self and others; an area they feel is being transformed by IT and the proliferation of social media platforms. Many of the young artists whose work is featured, such as Ryoichi Ishikawa and Mari Katayama, shine a spotlight on individual events and stories based on their own research, through which alternative histories, reflections on physical body and gender, and alternative landscapes emerge. While exploring individual identities in the digital age, the exhibition offers visitors a comprehensive look into the modern Japanese art scene in multiple media, covering a wide range of contemporary works. Mori Art Museum. **Until Jul 10. Tel: 03-5777-8600.** 📍 Roppongi. [www.mori.art.museum/english/contents/roppongix2016/](http://www.mori.art.museum/english/contents/roppongix2016/) *Dan Grunebaum*



## APR 16 ASAKUSA YABUSAME

One of the perks of living in a culturally-rich city like Tokyo is its historical offerings. Among the city's 23 wards, Taito-ku is renowned for its deep-seated respect for old Japanese customs. In fact, the Taito-ku ward office has preserved numerous traditional events from the olden days. Held every year in Sumida Park, Asakusa Yabusame is a rare opportunity for people to observe Japan's military history in action. Yabusame, or equestrian archery, has a very long history in Japan, tracing back to as far as the late seventh century, as recorded in *Nihon Shoki* ("The Chronicles of Japan"), with roots starting at the beginning of the Kamakura Period. Initially a New Year's event, Asakusa Yabusame has preserved the artform since the Edo Period, and the gallantry of the archers is like watching a *nishiki-e* painting come to life. **Sumida Park. Apr 16, 11am. Free admission.** 📍 Asakusa. Tel: 03-5246-1111.





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### APR 1 TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND

The Tedeschi Trucks Band is more than a blues ensemble; it's also a family business. Since the Florida group's formation in 2010, the husband-and-wife team of singer-songwriter Susan Tedeschi and guitar virtuoso Derek Trucks have built up indomitable momentum. Just a year after their debut, Tedeschi Trucks Band went on to win the Grammy for Best Blues Album, catapulting the group into household-name status in the world of modern blues. Tedeschi's powerful, impassioned vocal styles channel the spirit of the late Etta James and Janis Joplin, delivering melodies with heart, poignancy, and command. Layered underneath the vocals is Trucks' masterful sliding guitar, a playing style he's raised to new artistic heights. The Tedeschi Trucks Band gathers groups of their longtime collaborators, and invite you to a family get-together like no other at Nippon Budokan. **Nippon Budokan. Apr 1, 7pm. ¥8,800. ㊟ Kudanshita. Tel: 03-3216-5100.**



### APR 2-3 GOGO PENGUIN

Manchester has long been a melting pot of musical innovation, and the proud home to many of today's music icons. GoGo Penguin is one of the U.K. city's latest exports—and also happens to be one of the most unorthodox talents to emerge in the world of modern jazz. Those who've heard their music will understand that the trio's "acoustic electronica" sound is no gimmick. Combining the sounds of dubstep, trip-hop, jazz, and modern classical music, the Mercury Prize-nominated ensemble will showcase the future sound of jazz for the very first time here in Japan. Whatever your musical preference, GoGo Penguin's genre-defying groove, irresistible piano melodies, and dynamic bass sound are guaranteed to leave a deep impression on listeners, making for another unmissable night. **Blue Note Tokyo. Apr 2-3, 5 & 8pm. ¥7,800. Tel: 03-5485-0088. ㊟ Omotesando. http://gogopenguin.co.uk**



### APR 2-3 24th YOKOHAMA ŌOKAGAWA SAKURA MATSURI

With flora and festivities aplenty, spring is the time when the whole of Japan gets together to celebrate the nation's rich natural beauty. As far as flower watching goes, Yokohama's Ōokagawa Sakura Matsuri truly captures the festivities of spring, taking *hanami* to a whole new level. Now in its 24th year, this festival will transform the streets of Hinodecho through to Koganecho with food stalls, flea markets, and live entertainment—with "spring and flower" being the theme for each facility. The sight of over 500 *Somei Yoshino* (a type of cherry blossom hybrid) lavishly decorating the Ōokagawa promenade is simply breathtaking, whether viewed from the streets on foot or down by the river from a canoe. Don't miss the *yozaкура* ("night-time cherry blossoms") reflecting on the river in the evening—an ethereal sight. **Apr 2-3, 11am-12am. Free entry. ㊟ Koganecho. http://river-sakura.com/ (Japanese)**



### APR 25 TAME IMPALA

Australian psychedelic rock band Tame Impala returns to Japan with their third album, *Currents*. The group wowed Japanese audiences with their euphoric, synth-heavy sound at Fuji Rock Festival, and are expected to sell out shows when they perform in Tokyo and Osaka this month. 2015's *Currents* was a homerun for the shaggy-haired rockers, receiving a Grammy nomination for Best Alternative Music Album this year. The album blends elements of the group's unique psychedelic sound with groovy R&B and disco influences. Frontman, the multi-instrumentalist Kevin Parker, has been enchanting audiences on the group's world tour, delivering elevating performances with his light and hypnotic voice. With impressively "far-out" audio-visual accompaniments, Tame Impala provides a solid night of toe-tapping vibes. **Zepp Tokyo. Apr 25, 7:30pm. ¥6,500-7,000. ㊟ Aomi. www.tameimpala.com/tours**



### APR 28 EDITOR'S PICK WE LOVE '80S DISCO

Groovers of the world unite! On the night of Thursday, April 28, Grand Hyatt Tokyo will take you back to the golden era of dance music with *We Love '80s Disco*. As part of the special event, the hotel's luxurious Grand Ballroom will be transformed into an international nightclub, complete with mirrored balls, disco-themed décor, and a mega-dancefloor. The music will be provided by none other than DJ Oshy, the pioneer of the '80s disco movement in Japan. He will spin a soundtrack of '80s disco's greatest that everybody can dance the night away to. The ticket price includes free beverages and snacks, and disco lovers can enjoy a 10-percent discount at all restaurants and bars at the Grand Hyatt Tokyo! Come and relive the magic of the '80s! **Grand Hyatt Tokyo, Grand Ballroom. Apr 28. ¥13,000. 8pm-12am. ㊟ Roppongi. http://meturl.com/80sdisco**



### APR 30 ANDREW WEATHERALL

Restless U.K. producer Andrew Weatherall returns to Japan to promote his first proper solo album in seven years, *Convenanza*. A teaser track posted online, "The Confidence Man," deliberately hauled listeners back to electronic music's ecstasy-addled Madchester days. The tune's hypnotic basslines, synth arpeggios, and droney lyrics are rooted in the dance-rock revolution Weatherall himself helped spark through production work for the likes of Happy Mondays, Primal Scream, and his own techno unit Sabres of Paradise. In addition to being one of the most prolific producers out there, Weatherall is renowned for his ability to recreate and refine tracks by other artists; his remix of My Bloody Valentine's "Soon" is a must-hear. The veteran DJ will kick off his Japan tour in Shibuya. **Shibuya Womb. Apr 30, 11pm. ¥3,000. ㊟ Shibuya. http://soundcloud.com/andrew-weatherall Dan Grunebaum**



# BEHIND THE OAK DOOR

Bring together the pieces of the perfect burger

BY LUPITA MAMBWE



Scan the Tokyo landscape and you'll find burgers everywhere. Well, not literally on the ground, but in shops. And not just of the Wendy's, Lotteria, and Mickey D's variety, but towering, creative, and mouthwatering sorts that turn the simple patty-on-bun into a work of art. Just as the city has seen an explosion in craft beers, so too have craft burgers descended on the culinary explorer.

Some of the most creative burgers are being produced by the shops and restaurants highlighted in this issue's special burger section. Amongst those leading the way in brainstorming are the chefs of The Oak Door, one of the dining venues found at The Grand Hyatt Tokyo.

The Oak Door has become a favorite of locals as well as visitors, known especially for their standard eponymous burger (shown on this issue's cover). But this imposing stack of goodness isn't the only thing on the menu. This team of cooks prides itself on creativity, and is always pushing for the next great sandwich. And to find out what makes them tick, Metropolis went behind the oak door.



## AT THE HEART OF IT ALL

With anything you create, there's a critical starting point—that one thing that can't be missed, or else the whole endeavor fails. When it comes to burgers, word from the Oak Door kitchen is

that there are two critical elements: good bread and a good patty mixture. While that may sound obvious, the point is that you need both. You can have a so-so patty and good bread—or the other way around; but in either case, you're





Photos courtesy of The Oak Door

## DO YOU TAKE THIS BURGER...?

Given the variety of burgers The Oak Door has created, we wanted to find out if there was anything truly crazy in the kitchen's past. Larimer recounts the time a wedding party went for an unorthodox cake ... made of meat. It came in the form of the giant, one-kilogram burger that has graced the menu in the past, and will again be available for the duration of May. Only this one was much, much bigger. "There was a wedding that was about 50 or 60 people," the chef explains, "and the burger itself was 54 centimeters! We cut it like a big cake. That was a huge challenge to cook a perfectly medium 54-centimeter-wide hamburger. But it was perfect, and they were very happy."



Photo by Kohji Shiki

only halfway there. A great burger is a tango of wheat and meat that must play off of one another perfectly.

OK, so the bread doesn't have to be wheat, but whatever you choose, it needs to be good. If it's too hard or dry, the bun won't deliver the right flavor component to go with a burger. Finding just the right balance is key. After all, it takes two to make a thing go right.

## WINNING THE POPULAR VOTE

Building the burger you see on the cover of this issue of *Metropolis* was Chef Tim Larimer, a native Californian who loves the stuff. We chatted with Tim as we watched the step-by-step progress take place against the backdrop of wood-fire ovens. It was hot! But not as hot as some of the seasonal creations that he and his fellow cooks have put on the Oak Door menu.

"At the moment, our most popular burger is the Dixie Burger," Larimer explained, "with whiskey bacon jam spread, pimento cheese, and fried green tomatoes." Although this burger is available only during March, it's a great example of the kind of collective thinking that defines the restaurant's approach to the American—no global—favorite. In this case, however, the twist is most definitely American, taking inspiration from the flavors of the Deep South to create a burger you'd never expect to find in Japan.

"The one before that I personally really liked," Larimer continues, "was the Mexican Burger. Nice spicy jalapeños, smoky chili sauce, and of course, fresh avocado. I'm from California, so I love those flavors."

Other unique offerings include beets, blue cheese, salmon, and even mac'n'cheese.

## BEEFY BRAINTRUST

So how do all of these unique ideas come to be? It's the result of a collaborative effort. Just as fine athletes play off of one another's strengths and experience, the chefs of The Oak Door do the same—but with food. Everyone has their own idea of the perfect burger, and everyone has certain flavors that hit close to home, that bring back memories of childhood and places they've been.

Getting together to talk about what flavors they want to incorporate into seasonal menus is the starting point. From here, anything they grew up with that we really enjoyed back home is game. Or anything that may be experimental. It's all about exploring the possibilities, and that's how they come up with things like the Dixie Burger, for example. A chef had spent time down in the South, where intake of pimento cheese and fried green tomatoes is required by law.

## SESAME SEASONS

Japan loves its seasonal cuisines, so burgers tied to spring, summer, winter, and autumn are a must. But what is it about a season that shapes a burger?

According to The Oak Door, it's all about the produce. The season dictates certain ingredients, and on those, a chef can put a special twist. Beets, for example, are big in winter, thus The Oak Door's beet burger was born.

Hotter weather calls for stronger flavors: peppery flares, and maybe even a bit of greasiness. The odds and ends of summertime may lead toward a sweeter take. In the end, seasonal produce is the engine that powers the seasonal burger.

## DIY

While The Oak Door menu is great, you can't eat there every day. So how do you create a better burger at home? Chances are you don't have a giant wood-burning oven in your kitchen, or a meat grinder to turn your favorite cuts of beef into patties. Never fear, the Oak Door team has some advice for the home cook.

Start with the right bread. Get good bread from your local bakery, or if you have a bread machine you can make your own bread. For the patty, if possible, avoid using ground meat ("menchi"), because it's too fine-grained and will become too dry. If you can, hand-cut full pieces of beef and form the minced meat into patties. You'll get a much more delicious burger using cheap, tough cuts. If you have your own barquette grill, even a small grill on your patio, it makes a difference. And to get the perfect flavor, use *sakura* or plum wood.

## BURGERTIME

The options for enjoying burgers in Tokyo are almost unlimited. Celebrate the warming weather by exploring the menus of the wide range of eateries the city has to offer. The Oak Door Burger is a perfect starting point, and from there the sky's the limit!

Find out more about The Oak Door burgers at <http://meturl.com/oakdoorburgers>.





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## BUNBOUGU CAFE

A funky and chic stationery café

BY VESNA KEVORK



I walk downstairs, expecting a wine cellar, a cool hideout, or a dusty bookstore. Instead, I find something much better: the Bunbougū Cafe, a trendy haunt that's made even more favorable because of its basement location. The entrance invites me with various stationery, knick-knacks, and DIY birthday cards. It's colorful and eclectic.

I am further greeted by an avalanche of unique stationery, beautiful pens and drawing materials, a carefully put-together wine cellar on one wall of the café, and a drawing corner where patrons attempt to replicate the head of a sculpture. There is a myriad of stickers available, for each and every occasion. I am elated particularly by the wine glass stickers: moustache or triangles ... take your pick!

Crayons in the shape of a hippopotamus, a menu scribed in chalk, a salute to the patrons ... charming, retro, and welcoming. And its essence is very much Tokyo; there's nowhere else in the world you'd find something this interesting and unique.

The wine cellar boasts a small but interesting and varied collection of high-quality wines from a number of countries. Each comes with a small package of stationery attached to it.

So many items capture my attention, I do not know where to look first.

The lunch choices are around the ¥900-1,200 mark, and come with a complimentary drink. They offer a healthy pasta dish, a bagel with avocado and shrimp, soups, and salads.

There are only five or six items, but there's enough to cover what this chic demographic in the Omotesando and Aoyama district is interested in.

Spaghetti bolognese with fresh mozzarella cubes accompanied by a cup of miso soup is my choice of the day. Pasta with a uniquely Japanese flair—and a side of crayons and chalk.

The desserts on offer on my visit are roughly ¥580-800: an affogato, apple gratin with cream made from sake, and roasted Japanese-tea crème brûlée with honey. The many kinds of coffees (approximately ¥500-600) are delicious and presented with artwork on the froth. Mine had a broad smile and an outline of a bear.

As I sit down, I notice drawing paper on the table and inquire about it. I have two options, should I wish to unleash my creative self: sketch or write poetry, or become an amateur playwright during my lunch break.

Or—and I wait for the pregnant pause—I can become a member, which costs ¥700 for unlimited and continuous access to a key. “A key?” I think.

An official member gets a key for the drawers of the café tables, an official membership title, and number. For this one-off fee of ¥700, you get many little perks. The main draw: the ability to unlock all the table drawers in the café and play with the crayons. Additionally, you get a 10-percent discount on food and drinks. You can reserve a table on weekdays, receive an official title, and are invited to events.

I've never been one to reject a title. So, I decide to surrender, as I am deeply curious about what I'll find in the drawers. I hand over the ¥700 fee, and await the key for the drawers of the tables, which is mine to keep for good. Now, it's almost time for me to emerge as part of this elite, underground stationery café club. Joy, joy!



I find myself in the world of Narnia, opening a drawer instead of a door, and having access to crayons, notepads, and stickers that I use during the course of my lunch. This membership and element of surprise are what draw me even further into my world of love for Japan.

I scribble “Antananarivo”—a secret note to myself, hoping that one day, if I come here frequently enough, my wish to visit and photograph Madagascar and the lemurs will actualize.

I leave, having had a satisfying pasta and having bought a crayon in the shape of a hippopotamus as a gift, and having now become a member of a basement stationery café. I remind myself to write about, and allow myself to dream about exotic photography expeditions in the future. Antananarivo, here I come!

The café inspires creativity, play, and daydreaming. On my way out, convinced I've experienced it all and satisfied, I am delighted when I notice that there's more.

The staff have scribbled in a black marker “Thank you,” on the staircase, and it is visible on the way out of the café. This is replete with an anime drawing. The words and imagery guide you on your way out of the basement. Could this little spot be more charismatic?

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# INTERVIEW

## CHEF ANDY HUGHES

### The man behind The Pink Cow's Cal-Mex cuisine

BY MARTIN LEROUX

**T**he Pink Cow is a mainstay in the Tokyo arts scene. The cozy atmosphere, warm with a laid-back California vibe, gathers artists and art fans to mingle and perform. The food is also a huge part of what put the Roppongi art space and restaurant on the radar of many Tokyo residents. Renowned for hearty burritos, The Pink Cow has served up a wide variety of Cal-Mex fusion cuisine for over 15 years. *Metropolis* talks to the man that makes the magic happen, Chef Andy Hughes, about the Cow, the cuisine, and the Queen.

#### Tell us about yourself.

My name's Andy. I'm a chef. I've been a chef for 32 years now. I trained in some major hotels in London, and I worked on the [*Queen Elizabeth 2*] passenger ship for a few years. Then I came to Japan. I've been here with Traci [Consoli, owner] at The Pink Cow ever since.

#### How did you discover cooking?

I left school at quite a young age: I was 17 years old. I decided to [take] a cooking course at an air force base close to where we used to live, in Kent, England. I did that for six months. I passed, and then just progressed slowly, moved up to London, started my proper training. My training was four years in a hotel, with one day a week in college.

#### What was home cooking for you, growing up?

Mum was good at roast dinners. Not a whole lot else, to be honest! [Laughs.] Roast dinners, that's pretty much it, really! My mum's cooking didn't have any influence in my moving into the catering industry, to be honest. That came much later. We did own a small hotel when we were children. My mum and dad, they had a small, 11-bedroom hotel in Kent for about seven years. My mother ran the kitchen on the hotel side, my dad did the bar.

#### What made you decide to come to Japan?

To cut a long story short, when I worked on the

*QE2* ship—that was back in 1990—we were basically a floating hotel in Tokyo for six months. I met a girl in a bar and, basically, we got together for six weeks; then I went back to England and she followed. Anyway, we got married. She stayed there for 11 years, we had a daughter, and in 2002, we decided to move back to Japan. Probably the best thing I ever did; no regrets. I'm very happy.

#### You've also worked at a five-star hotel.

Before the *QE2*, I worked for a hotel called The Barkley, which was part of the Savoy Group in London. From there, I went to the Institute of Directors in Pall Mall. I was a sous chef, then head chef, and I spent 11 years there. And that's where I left to come to Tokyo.

#### Word has it you've also cooked for the Queen.

I was part of a big team of chefs that worked in the premiere restaurant called The Queen's Grill. Odd name, isn't it? [Laughs.] When we were sitting in port in Southampton, England, part of the ... it was some road celebration; the Queen came aboard, she had lunch in The Queen's Grill, and I was part of the team that made her food.

#### Did she give you any feedback?

Not me; I was a fairly junior chef back in those days. We had no negative comments from her, so that's normally a good sign.

#### How did you become The Pink Cow head chef?

I arrived in April 2002. I took a couple months off, then I started looking around. I met a lady called Lauren Shannon ... and she put me in contact with Traci. We sat down, we had an interview, we sat down for 10 minutes. And it's been bliss ever since, he says with a smile!

#### Did you create the famous Cal-Mex menu?

Pretty much all the menu is done by me. Our base is Cal-Mex—Mexican, Californian—but we do all sorts of international menus for different customers. Whatever people want, really! People get in contact with us, give us a budget, tell us roughly what they want to eat, and I write the menu. And nine times out of 10, it's pretty successful. People go away quite happy!

#### How did you come up with the whole Cal-Mex idea for the Cow?

That was Traci's idea, really! We just looked at our-

selves: we're a Mexican food base, but California style. So she thought, "Cal-Mex" ... we put that together, that sounded quite good. So we went with it, and it's very popular.

#### What's most important about food to you?

That you really like—and you really take it very seriously—whatever you're preparing. You do that a hundred percent all the time, or it doesn't work out. So you have to be committed and really focus all the time. Even after a long week ... you've got to love what you do, really.

#### No signs of stopping for you in the kitchen?

No, I never want to retire! I love it!

**The Pink Cow. B1 Roi Bldg., 5-5-1 Roppongi, Minato-ku. ☎ Roppongi. [www.thepinkcow.com](http://www.thepinkcow.com)**



## RECIPE

# QUESADILLA

BY ANDY HUGHES



## INGREDIENTS

6 six-inch flour tortillas  
Mexican jalapeños, chopped  
100g mixed shredded cheese

SERVINGS  
3

## FRESH TOMATO SALSA

- 1 fresh tomato, roughly chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- Coriander, freshly chopped
- 1 tsp tabasco
- Juice of half a lemon
- Salt and pepper

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Separate the tortillas.
2. Top three tortillas with cheese and jalapeños. Place the remaining three on top.
3. Lightly grill or pan-fry in a little oil until crisp and golden.
4. Serve with fresh tomato salsa and enjoy.

Photo by Martin Leroux



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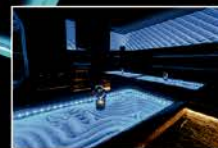
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## NOODLE TOWN

Yokohama's tribute to an iconic Japanese cuisine

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY THOMAS BEECHER

There's a lot to get excited about in Yokohama. Grand architecture, abundant restaurants and shops, and world-class sporting—go Baystars!—make Tokyo's little sister to the south a popular spot for a leisurely escape from the hustle and bustle of the capital. Yokohama is also developing a reputation as Japan's go-to for all things ramen.

The noodle odyssey begins at the Shin-Yokohama Ramen Museum, a food theme park that, as you might have guessed, is centered around the history of ramen. The ground-floor museum/gift shop offers a well-presented exhibition of the dish's history in Japan, starting with the “predawn of ramen”—first slurped in 1665—and ending with its popularization and eventual diversification over the course of the 20th century. The museum also houses a statue of the chipper-looking Uncle Charumera, a popular 1960s instant ramen ad mascot.

But below ground, the magic really begins. Sprawled out in the space is a two-level food court modeled after a Japanese street from 1958, a significant year for the ramen industry. Strolling past the extraordinarily well-designed fake-exterior shops and houses, beneath the backlit artificial sky ceiling, is about as bizarre as it gets. There's a barber shop, a beauty salon, and even an old-timey cinema



with a board displaying movie times. But of course, nothing is as it seems.

Food options include nine ramen restaurants, all with their own distinct take on the beloved dish. Fortunately, each store offers small-size bowls, so depending on your appetite, you can sample a few. Sumire, which claims to be the most famous miso ramen shop in Japan, offers their classic Miso Ramen (¥570-900) with medium-thick Hokkaido-style noodles. Its thick *dashi* (“broth”) is on the lighter side of ramen and goes well with Sumire's uniquely red *yuzu* (pickled citrus fruit), for extra fragrance.

The museum also showcases international takes on ramen, including Italian variations at Casa Luca and German variations at Mukus Zweite, a pop-up from the popular Frankfurt-based Ramen Mukus. Mukus Zweite offers the wonderfully rich Mukus Ramen (¥570-900), a *tonkotsu shōyu* (“pork bone



and soy sauce”) ramen with noodles so thick and chewy, you'll be yelling “*wunderbar*” after every bite—yelling optional. The menu also includes German classics like Frankfurters and sauerkraut (¥500).

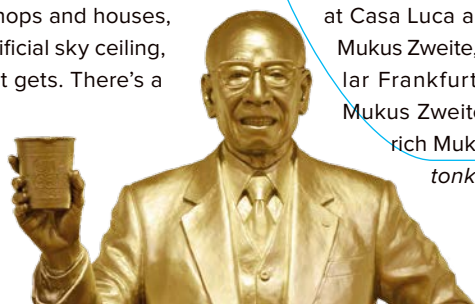
To complete your noodle tour of Yokohama, pop in to the sleek and modern Momofuku Ando Instant Ramen Museum, better known as “The Cup Noodles Museum,” in the waterfront neighborhood of Minatomirai. The museum offers a visual—and edible—history of the universally appreciated instant ramen, which first appeared in 1958, following its creation by the Taiwanese-Japanese inventor Momofuku Ando, the so-called “father of instant ramen.” The second-floor exhibition space features a wonderful reproduction of Momofuku's Ikeda-based work shed, where he's said to have concocted his noodle invention. The exhibit also features an aesthetic “instant noodle history cube,” which maps the product's history.

Like its Shin-Yokohama counterpart, the Cup Noodles Museum offers numerous eating options. The third-floor Cupnoodles Factory lets you build your own version of the convenience store classic—albeit slightly more gourmet—with over 5,000 flavor combinations to choose from (¥300). The factory also lets you look inside the “instafication” process, with a large noodle machine at the center of the hall.

The museum also showcases noodles from around the world in the festively-themed Noodles Bazaar, where you can pick among noodle favorites like Vietnamese pho, Italian pasta, Malaysian laksa, and Indonesian mie goreng. This bazaar is a fitting tribute to the influence that Momofuku's creation, which was once dubbed “magic ramen,” has had on the world. A home run for Japanese cuisine.

● **Shin-Yokohama Ramen Museum.** 2-14-21 Shinyokohama, Kohoku-ku, Yokohama. Tel:045-471-0503. Open Mon-Fri 11am-10pm, Sat 11am-10:30pm, Sun 10:30am-10pm. Admission ¥100-310. 🚶 Shin-yokohama. [www.raumen.co.jp/english](http://www.raumen.co.jp/english)

● **Cup Noodles Museum.** 2-3-4 Shinko, Naka-ku, Yokohama. Tel:045-345-0918. Open Wed-Mon 10am-6pm, closed Tue & hols. Admission ¥500. 🚶 Minatomirai. [www.cupnoodles-museum.jp/english/](http://www.cupnoodles-museum.jp/english/)





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# THE LITTLE DISTRICT THAT COULD

## Kotobuki's journey from slum to tourist destination

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MARI MINAKUCHI  
TRANSLATION BY CEZARY JAN STRUSIEWICZ

It's nearing noon, but the narrow, unlit corridor remains dark. Plywood doors line both sides of the stucco walls, all closed and locked. As I walk on, I find one door slightly open. On the other side is a room of roughly 60 square feet, with a folded futon mattress under the small window. Otherwise, there's no furniture anywhere.

I've found myself in a flophouse in Yokohama's Kotobuki-cho district. It was originally created to provide sleeping accommodations for day laborers who used to call this type of housing a "doya," a slang term that comes from the Japanese word "yado" ("lodging"). It was supposedly coined because those living here couldn't bring themselves to call these cheap flophouses proper lodgings.

Kotobuki is home to over 100 flophouses, which used to attract scores of day laborers and people looking to hire them. They're the ones who nicknamed the area "Doyaville." Young men in the prime of their lives flocked from all over the country to Doyaville looking for work, and also to cause some trouble—the latter earning the area a second nickname: "The Lawless Zone."

However, around 1990, Kotobuki lost its ability to function as a labor market because of widespread mechanization and worsening economic situations. Soon, people with jobs to offer stopped coming around, and most of the workers went to find their fortunes elsewhere. Those who stuck around didn't have an easy life. As they got older, they became unable to take on the more labor-intensive jobs. Abandoning the idea of looking for work outside of Kotobuki, many decided to go on welfare and locked themselves away in Doyaville's cheap rooms. Today, over 70 percent



of Kotobuki's residents, most of them elderly bachelors, live in one of the local flophouses.

As Kotobuki struggled with its stagnant population, its economy collapsed, and the district was forgotten by the world. But then, one man shined a ray of hope on the area. Tomohiko Okabe, an architectural major, noticed that the simple Kotobuki flophouses would make perfect hostels for backpackers. So he partnered up with the buildings' owners and remodeled the old lodgings into cozy, cheap guest rooms for tourists.

"It all started by accident after the flophouse owners talked to me about their problems with finding new lodgers." The wall behind him is plastered with photos taken by travelers who have stayed at one of Okabe's hostels.

Once the business started operating in 2005, word of mouth quickly spread, and each year Kotobuki has been seeing more travelers who could hardly believe they've found rooms for just a few thousand yen a night. With more outsiders visiting Kotobuki than ever before, scores of new people have started flocking to areas around the hostels on a regular basis.

Okabe laughs, remembering the neighborhood before he opened his first hostel. "There were loads of people pissing in the street. The stench was unbearable. I also saw many folks starting bonfires in old oil drums, and walking around the area completely naked."

But how did Kotobuki change so much in just 10 years? Once the district became the center of attention all over again, the local administration started putting some effort into beautifying the area and improving the manners of its residents.

"Nobody would pay attention if I stressed how safe Kotobuki was myself," Okabe says. "What they did pay attention to [was] all the tourists visiting the area. Soon, people started to notice that Kotobuki has gotten more backpackers, or that there were suddenly a lot more women around. Thanks to those things, the district's image slowly began to change."

Okabe has a soft spot for Kotobuki's doya residents, all of whom he calls "pops." Unemployed seniors living alone on welfare might seem like a sad sight, but some are actually enjoying their lives in Kotobuki. Okabe sees them as people who no longer have to toil away for a paycheck. "It's no different than living off your retirement."

"Lately, local office ladies have even started passing through Kotobuki on their way back home from work. In the past, they'd never have set foot in here," Okabe explains with a smile.

And so the slow eradication of Kotobuki's negative image continues.

**This story was originally published on IGNITION. Visit <http://ignition.co> for more features on Japanese culture.**







# THE SPIRITS OF FASHION



Tokyo Fashion Week is full of designers who take playing it safe to heart, as visiting journalists and buyers from abroad wonder where the extremes from the streets are on the polished runways.

The facts of the matter are twofold: first, Japanese fashion is actually incredibly conservative in the mainstream; second, designers tend to use the runway to show a different side of their brand or draw sharp focus to their collections' inspirations. Why present it as it's already worn on the street? However, there's an undeniable soul of Japanese street fashion that sometimes seems to be missing on the catwalk. Where is the thrill of improvisation, the character of the wearer, the sense of the familiar worn in a new way?

Luckily, Yoshikazu Yamagata's brand **Writtenafterwards** is on hand this Tokyo Fashion Week season with a characteristically charismatic collection. It may be easy to dismiss as the stuff of madness, but it really does stand up to very close scrutiny, and moreover tells us something about the current state of Tokyo fashion.

Yamagata has been something of a standard-bearer for the conception that defines the alternative fashion scene: the kind of fashion found in the remake shops of Koenji, the kind of coordinates built from high, low, or fast fashion, that somehow just works. It's a conception that stands worn by the audience of fashion shows but not on the runway; and on the streets, not

in the shops; not reducible to a single look, built as it is on the sum of its parts. Given the collection at hand, it might be wise to describe it as "spirit," and as the world looks to Japanese fashion, it's no surprise to see designers make it their muse.

For *Writtenafterwards*'s autumn/winter 2016-17 collection, Yamagata took the world of *yokai* as his theme—the mysterious bodies of ghosts, apparitions, and monsters of Japanese folklore. In Japanese tradition, a *yokai* can come from anywhere; the *tsukumogami* exists as an anthropomorphization of pretty much anything, from neglected umbrellas to kettles. And of course, the extremes of human behavior find





themselves the frequent subject of demonic depictions. They are united under a common theme of finding a spirit in all things in the animistic tradition, and identifying that actions and emotion have a sense of spirit that can be articulated in expression.

Yoshikazu Yamagata asks, what would the clothes of our wardrobes, and in particular those of the runway, look like as yokai of lore? As something of a provocateur, Yamagata couldn't help taking aim at European runways, rendering many brands' iconic ensembles in demon forms. He did this sometimes literally, as in Rick Owens' own cyclops-themed collection done up as Cyclops verbatim, but items from

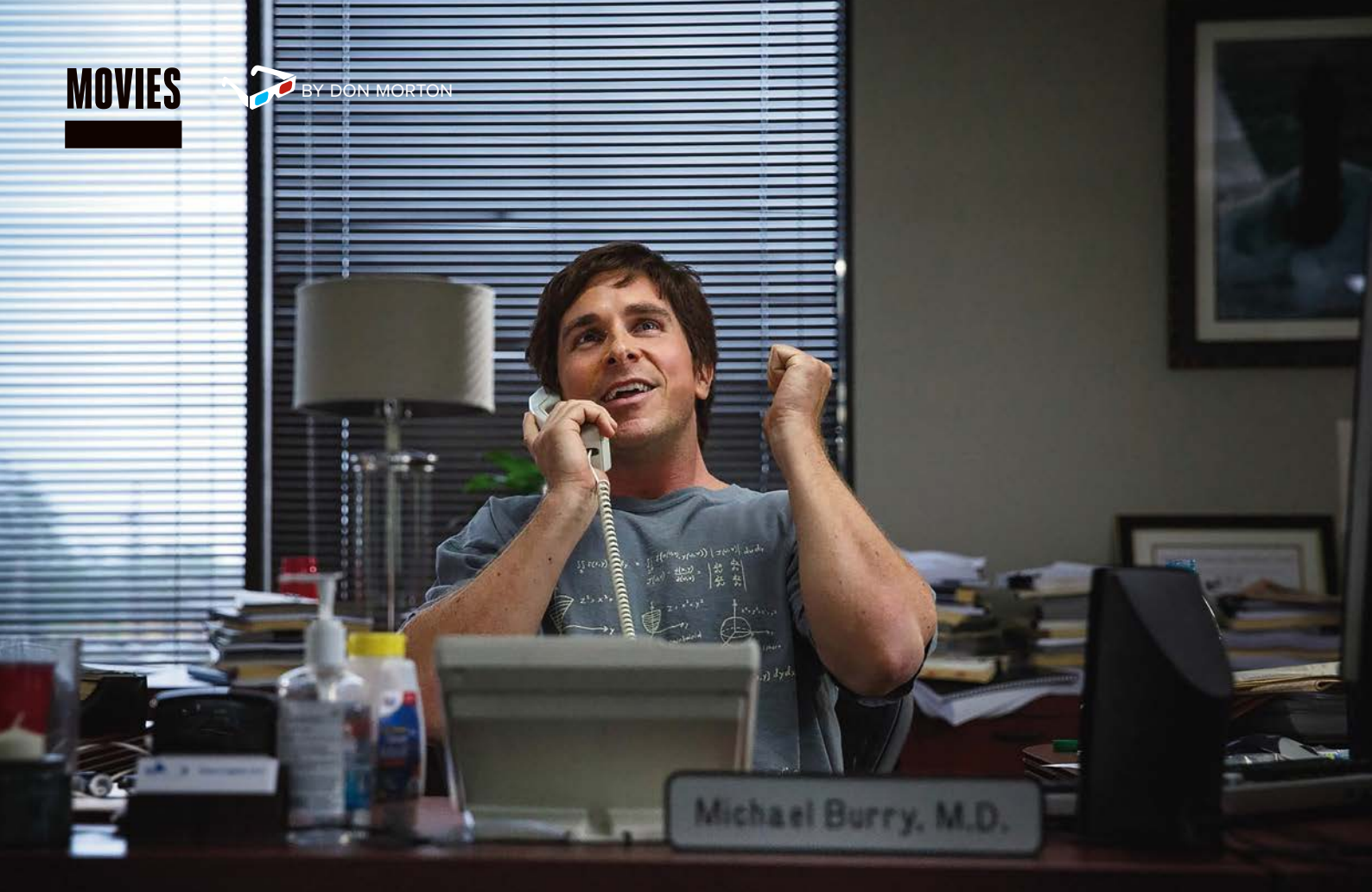
designers as diverse as Christian Lacroix and Vivienne Westwood found their way onto the catwalk in spirit form. I doubt there's anyone who managed to spot them all, as the various beasts staggered, swaggered, and danced down the runway.

But there was a greater point to the show beyond the showmanship, in that the fashion does create an aura for the wearer, in how they both look and move. Yamagata hammered that point home with many models restricted by high *geta* sandals, making their presences imposing, and their gait stuttered: the final model wore a heavy dress in thick sacking that she had to drag down the runway, barely able to move under its weight. Of course,

these examples were used to make the point, but Writtenafterwards also displayed positivity, encouraging models to embrace their outfits and express the pure enjoyment that should come with fashion, a world apart from the usual po-faced models that walk Tokyo Fashion Week.

Ultimately, it was Yamagata's skill in coordination and styling that brought the work together and best reflected the ephemeral spirit of Tokyo fashion. Outfits were unexpected, unsymmetrical, and layered in ways that took time to deconstruct. The string of models were all their own, with no tangible link between them in terms of silhouette and materials ... in essence, it was like walking Tokyo's streets. It was the spirit of Tokyo fashion.





## FEATURED MOVIE

## THE BIG SHORT

**W**hat we have here, improbably, is a movie about the 2008 subprime mortgage meltdown that's predictably sobering and infuriating, but also hugely informative and relentlessly entertaining.

This bit of edu-tainment from former *SNL* writer Adam McKay (*Anchorman*) crackles with wit, irreverence, and an oddball energy. Para-

doxically, its wacky, cartoonish approach tells the story much more vividly and memorably than could any straight drama.

Based on Michael Lewis' nonfiction book, it focuses on a handful of mavericks (including Steve Carell, Ryan Gosling, Brad Pitt, and a terrific Christian Bale). They see the subprime crash coming, sound the alarm—which no one heeds, and then mount a massive short-sell in the hope of making a ton of money. The film kind of plays down the concept that just because you defy the system doesn't mean you're not part of it. But that's a quibble.

The structure is unique. The characters, from time to time, break the fourth wall and directly

address the audience. A slick trick? Maybe. But it's done so naturally that gimmickry is not what immediately comes to mind. And it's an economical way to explain such arcane financial instruments as credit default swaps and collateralized debt obligations. Other fine points are taken up by entirely unrelated celebrities pressed into service to offer mini-lessons: Margo Robie in a bubble bath, Selena Gomez playing blackjack, and Anthony Bordain using a fish stew as an analogy.

The final message is appropriately brilliant and chilling. Wall Street is not fixed yet. You leave the theater amused, but thinking. Japanese Title: *Money Short*. (132 min)

NEW



## 45 YEARS

An aging couple planning their 45th anniversary is nudged softly off the rails by the arrival of a letter from the past, as it were.

This is a beautifully observed, gently explosive examination of a long-term, "good" marriage and the tender falsehoods that sustain it. The film is without contrivance or manipulation. It contains no grand gestures or big moments, yet the impression it leaves is huge. Tom Courtenay is excellent, but this is Charlotte Rampling's movie. The absolutely devastating final 10 minutes shows why she is one of our best actresses working today, of any age. Japanese title: *Sazanami*. (95 min)

NEW



## AUTÓMATA

Antonio Banderas does the *I, Robot* thing in this joyless, post-apocalyptic, noir-ish sci-fi romp. The film, by Spain's Gabe Ibáñez, has the look of a high-concept effort, but its basic concept of robots breaking protocol, altering themselves, and getting too smart for human comfort, has been derivative since Isaac Asimov made it up all these decades ago. And it steals bits from *Blade Runner* and *Terminator* while it's at it. High point: watching Melanie Griffith in a cameo trying to move her face. Overwrought, logic-free, terribly acted, deathly somber, dull as desert dirt, and generally ridiculous. (110 min)

NEW



## BANKSY DOES NEW YORK

In October of 2013, the British conceptual/street/installation/performance/scam artist known as

Banksy stirred up the Big Apple with a self-proclaimed, month-long "residency," offering one creative street concept per day, posted on his website—but without saying where. The art was great, but the more important—and totally intended—artistic subtext was the varied ways in which the Noo Yawkahz interacted with the pieces: taking selfies with them, defacing them, subsequently restoring them, or simply stealing them. The film is a lot of fun. Downside: several unbelievably annoying talking heads. (80 min)





### THE DANISH GIRL

Heavily fictionalized tale of the life of 1920s Danish artist Einar Wegener, later Lili Elbe, an unsung hero(ine) and pioneer of the transgender movement. Eddie Redmayne's the star, but Alicia Vikander steals every scene with her passionate, Oscar-winning performance as Wegener/Elbe's long-suffering but supportive wife Gerda. She's the audience surrogate and absolutely essential to the story. On the minus side, it's a tad self-important, and too tame. I wanted it to have a bigger emotional punch, to get inside its characters' heads. The director is Tom Hooper (*The King's Speech*, *Les Misérables*). (121 min)



### ESCOBAR: PARADISE LOST

A Canadian gringo (we don't want to offend nobody) falls in love with the pretty niece of the Colombian drug lord, is brought into the business, changes his mind when he's asked to kill somebody, and runs for his life. If you can survive the tedious first half, the second ramps up to a pretty good chase thriller. Problem is that, while Benicio Del Toro works his usual magic as the title narco, it's really a supporting role, with the bulk of the screen time devoted to said conflicted gringo. And casting the shallow, wussy Josh Hutcherson in the lead here has to be viewed as a major missed opportunity. Japanese title: *Rakuen no Okite*. (120 min)



### IRIS

Late, great documentarian Albert Maysles (*Gimme Shelter*) here turns his camera on singular nonagenarian Iris Apfel, the owl-bespectacled New York fashion icon, kitsch aficionado and, for want of a better phrase, world-class accessorizer. Like its subject, this is an endearing, vibrant, and energetic refutation of monocultural conformity that manages to achieve clarity amid apparent chaos and highlight her uncanny sense of style without diluting her mystery. Her wisdom is blunt, her wit sharp, and her creativity offbeat. Kind of person you'd like to meet. Not a fashion fan? See it anyway. Japanese title: *Iris Apfel! Kyuuju-yon Sai no New Yorker*. (79 min)



### THE LOBSTER

In a society that requires all adults to be married (not unlike Japan's corporate culture), the newly divorced are sent to "The Hotel," where they must find a mate with a shared characteristic (a job at match-up websites). If they fail to do so, they are turned into the animal of their choice. One such tenant is Colin Farrell, who put on 20 kilograms for the role. This surreal, subversive, and wonderfully warped film from Greece's Yorgos Lanthimos brims with wicked deadpan humor, and ends up being a love story of surprising tenderness and originality. Also Ben Whishaw, John C. Reilly, and a fabulous Olivia Coleman. (118 min)



### LOVE IS STRANGE

When two aging gay partners take advantage of their new right to marry, the official act causes the main breadwinner to be fired from his church choir job, leading to the loss of their apartment and to their having to temporarily but separately crash with friends and relatives. Veterans John Lithgow and Alfred Molina turn in some of their best work in this warm, seriocomic piece of cinematic counterprogramming. Nothing happens fast, and it focuses on life's smaller, more intimate moments. Your patience is required but enormously, if subtly, rewarded. Lovely, poignant soundtrack by Chopin. Japanese title: *Junsei wa Shousetsu yori Mokinari*. (94 min)



### MR. HOLMES

Bill Condon's (*Gods and Monsters*) revisionist film depicts the renowned detective Sherlock Holmes, now 93, retired these 30 years, facing possible dementia, teaching beekeeping to the fatherless son of his housekeeper (Laura Linney), and trying to remember the details of his last case. There are a few amusing insights regarding the fictitious detective of Watson's dime novels vs. this, the "real" one. Ian McKellen is alone worth the ticket price, and there are some unhurried rewards here. But the dramatic game is not afoot. Too many bland, overlapping stories that don't mesh, and a general dourness overall. (104 min)



### RICKI AND THE FLASH

The title bar-band singer/musician walked out on her husband (Kevin Kline) and kids decades ago to "find herself" in the California music scene. Now she's back in Indianapolis to face the music, so to speak. After a lot of yelling and blaming, she plays a few songs at a wedding and everything's fine. I found this humanist dramedy to be mildly enjoyable but a little too neat. It's just that you don't expect a film starring Meryl Streep, directed by Jonathan Demme, and scripted by Diablo Cody to pull its emotional punches this way. And by the end credits, my dominant emotion was, "Is that all there is?" Japanese title: *Shiawase wa Tsukamu Uta*. (102 min)



### THE SECOND BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL

It's rare for a film's title to serve as a review of the whole film. But here we have more of the same. This of course is only a bad thing if you didn't like the original. Old folks need movies, too. Problem is, unlike its predecessor, this does not have the benefit of a source novel, and the resulting confection is a tad sitcom-ish. But you don't watch something like this for the writing, and the terrific cast of British pros of a certain age (plus Richard Gere) almost makes it work. I found it a tad dull, and I'm elderly. Obligatory Bollywood closing dance number. A "Third Best" is a near certainty. Japanese title: *Marigold Hotel: Shiawase na Dainishou*. (124 min)



### THAT SUGAR FILM

Australia's Damon Gameau applies the self-abusing technique that Morgan Spurlock used so effectively in *Super Size Me* somewhat less effectively to the topic of hidden sugar in our diets. For two months, he kept his daily caloric intake the same, but ate only perceived "health" foods. His not-quite-earth-shattering conclusion that sugar is bad for us is presented with easily digestible, cartoony graphics. The science is scattershot, and the film gets increasingly gimmicky and irksome (a friggin' dance finale!), but he builds his case well. Overall, informative and mildly entertaining. Japanese title: *Amaku nai Satou no Hanashi*. (90 min)



### THE WHOLE TRUTH

The good news is that finally a movie is being released in Japan before the rest of the world. The bad news is that it's a great big Keanu Reeves turkey. He plays a hotshot lawyer—and if you buy that, I've got some nice ocean-front property in Arizona I want to show you—charged with defending a 17-year-old kid who has admitted to killing his father (and Jim Belushi, too!). Also Renée Zellweger, nearly unrecognizable from her *Bridget Jones/Chicago* days. Far as I can tell, the aim was to make the most derivative, boring courtroom drama possible. Succeeds. Big twist ending you can see coming an hour away. Japanese title: *Sajou no Houtei*.



### SHERLOCK: THE ABOMINABLE BRIDE

The *Sherlock* television series, starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman, successfully tweaks Conan Doyle's formula by setting the action in the present day, but this holiday one-off reverts to the original canon's Victorian Era setting. Viewers not familiar with the TV series (like me) may find the present-day bookends a tad befuddling, but once you get past that, it's devilishly good fun. After the titular mad bride very publicly commits suicide, she eerily returns to life to gun down her husband. Highly atmospheric, imaginatively filmed and played mostly for laughs. The game's afoot! (90 min)



### CAROL

A shop girl in 1950s New York finds love with an older woman trapped in a loveless marriage. This sophisticated yet accessible romantic spellbinder by Todd Haynes (*Far From Heaven*, *I'm Not There*, *Velvet Goldmine*) will draw you in. You've seen roles tailored for a particular actor; expand that to an entire movie seemingly calibrated to match Cate Blanchett's prodigious talents. And Rooney Mara matches her step for subtle step. Each glance, each touch, carries tremendous emotional weight. By the end, you may find that you care about these two individuals more than you thought you would. (118 min)





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When Western silent films were first imported into Japan, there was no technology to stamp subtitles onto them. Filling the need were **benshi**, live film narrators who would not only translate the intertitles from their original language, but would read lines in synch with the actors on screen and improvise sound effects. Their popularity was such that silent films continued to be shown far into the talkie era. Most amazingly, the art form is still practiced. Cinemart

(3-13-3 Shinjuku; [www.cinemart.co.jp/theater/shinjuku/](http://www.cinemart.co.jp/theater/shinjuku/)) welcomes two benshi April 5-6. The short **Dough and Dynamite** has Charlie Chaplin getting into a sticky situation as a baker and the feature **Seven Chances** (pictured) stars Buster Keaton as a hapless man pursued by hundreds of potential brides who have heard about his million-dollar inheritance.

The werewolf genre appeared nearly as exhausted as its vampire cousin when along came **When Animals Dream**, an atmospheric coming-

of-age horror flick set in a Danish fishing village. Most teenagers don't understand what is going on with their bodies, but Marie really has a hard time, what with the hairy chest and all. And she doesn't get much help from her invalid mother, who passed down the curse. On from April 16 at Human Trust Cinema Shibuya (Cocoti Bldg. 7,8F 1-23-16, Shibuya-ku; [www.ht-cinema.com](http://www.ht-cinema.com)).

Yebisu Garden Cinema (4-20-2 Ebisu, Shibuya-ku; [www.unitedcinemas.jp/yebisu](http://www.unitedcinemas.jp/yebisu)) presents two Scandinavian films that make up for their desolate settings with heartwarming stories. On from April 9 is **Babette's Feast**, which became the first Danish film to win the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar in 1987. Based on a story by Isak Dinesen, it explores the relationship between a French cook and the strictly religious sisters she works for. On from April 19 is the Norwegian comedy **Here is Harold**, about a man who plots revenge after his small furniture shop is driven out of business by an Ikea that opens next door.

The latest effort from writer-director Shunji Iwai, **A Bride for Rip Van Winkle**, is in theaters now and celebrating with a visit to his back catalogue is Waseda Shochiku (1-5-16 Takadanobaba, Shinjuku-ku; [www.wasedashochiku.co.jp](http://www.wasedashochiku.co.jp)), April 2-8. **Love Letter** (1995) established Iwai's minimalistic visual style and focus on relationships with a story of two women who bond through an accidental correspondence, while **Picnic** (1996) and **April Story** (1998) continued his most prolific period.

## EIGA LOWLIFE LOVE

BY ROB SCHWARTZ

A foreign financier working in Japanese cinema is pretty rare. Yet, British producer Adam Torel and Japanese director Eiji Uchida have forged a strong relationship after Torel distributed Uchida's 2013 film **Greatful Dead**. The pair have now teamed up to create **Lowlife Love**, a raw and powerful look into Japan's indie film world. Tetsuo (Kiyohiko Shibukawa) is a wannabe film director who spends his time seducing aspiring actresses and fleecing his friends of what little money they have. He's set up a film "club" to gouge naïve would-be collaborators and take advantage of admirer Mamoru (Yoshihiko Hosoda). When attractive but mousey actress Minami (Maya Okano) joins his club, Tetsuo sees she has actual talent. She is shocked by his advances, but soon learns the route to the top for actresses is via the bedroom.



Tetsuo continues to take credit for work that's not his. He attempts to team up with established filmmaker Kano (Kanji Furutachi), but his ego and nasty temperament get in his way. The situations and personalities feel true-to-life, and the Shimo-Kitazawa locations are spot on, but the flick falters in pushing forward the key characters. Minami, who Tetsuo sees as his muse, goes from

a shy, stammering, shocked lass to a scheming sex goddess with a big career in the blink of an eye. We need more development if this is to be affecting. Still, this unique work is a breath of fresh air in a melodrama-addicted industry. At Theatre Shinjuku from April 2. It will be screened with English subtitles every Thursday. (Japanese title: *Gesu no Ai*; 118 min.)





Courtesy of Hip Land Music

## J-indie's "it" band

BY DAN GRUNEBAUM

**T**he singer for what may be Japan's "it" band of the moment is a refreshingly down-to-earth guy. In a half-hour interview with *Metropolis* at The Fin.'s Tokyo record office, Yuto Uchino is not embarrassed to admit the group started as a Strokes cover band.

"Actually, we're all friends since we were four," he laughs. "We went to the same kindergarten in Takarazuka. It's a beautiful town; you should come sometime."

The Fin. may have started as a cover band, but they quickly evolved into a vehicle for Uchino's synth-driven indie-pop creations. "I was writing for another band," he recalls, "but decided to ask my friends to play my songs."

The durable friendship between Uchino, guitarist Ryosuke Odagaki, bassist Takayasu Taguchi, and drummer Kaoru Nakazawa—now all in their mid 20s—provided the foundation for a fast ascent to the top of music blogs and streaming websites across Japan.

That came in the form of a track they put out on SoundCloud, which brought them thousands of listeners in a sudden swarm in 2013. "A lot of people listened to it, and just like that, we got signed," Uchino says. "We hadn't done a lot of gigs, but we had a lot of original material and the internet."

The Fin. was soon entertaining offers from

major labels, but opted to sign with indie imprint Hip Land. "I don't like major labels because they approach their job as a manufacturer, not as art creation," says Uchino. "But Kazuto from Hip Land was really thinking about the band, so I felt I could focus exclusively on music and create only what I want."

When *Glowing Red On The Shore* dropped in 2014, Uchino gained a reputation for stylish songs that blend aspects of synthpop, chillwave, and dream pop. Word spread, and The Fin. soon found themselves signed to U.K. label Lost In The Manor for their *Night Time* EP.

Tours of Europe, the U.S., and Asia soon followed. Aside from the international sound of their music, the fact that Uchino sings in English has also made them accessible to an overseas audience.

"I've been listening to music in English since I was a child, because my mom and dad like British and American rock like the Rolling Stones, so it's natural," he says. "Actually, I used to write in Japanese, but it didn't work well for me, because the rhythm is so different. I was listening to music only in English, so creating Japanese lyrics didn't mesh."

Uchino's international experiences inform the lead track off their brand-new EP *Through The Deep*. "The first song, 'White Breath,' is about our trip to Ireland a year ago," he

explains. "We went to film a video and it was winter. It was so cold and rainy. I was moved by the scenery and people. It was very beautiful but bleak and lonely, because Ireland is so far from Japan, and so different. The song is about the gap between the good and bad energy."

The Fin.'s songs are very much Uchino's personal creations, but the band has found a way to balance his leadership with friendship rooted in childhood. "I create demos and ar-

range all parts: drum, bass, guitars, synthesizers. Then I send my demos to the members and they learn the parts," he says. "Sometimes it's difficult, because friendship is weak and easily broken. But we're brothers, so we can say anything to each other and it's not going to be a disaster."

With a nationwide tour to be followed by the U.K. in May and an Asia visit in June, Uchino won't have much time to slow down. But one can't help feeling that his innate introspectiveness will remain, no matter how much "fame and glory" the band finds.

"My hometown Takarazuka is near the sea, so sometimes I go to the beach by bike, and just sit and watch the waves, and hear the sounds thinking about my life," he muses. "Making music is like creating alter egos one by one—like translating myself into the music."

**Shibuya Club Quattro, April 9. [www.thefin.jp](http://www.thefin.jp)**





# ALBUM REVIEW



## SCANDAL YELLOW

BY LAURIER TIERNAN

many Westerners toward Japanese people? Where did the schoolgirl uniforms go?

The Muppets hypothesis goes by the wayside upon reading the album credits, and discovering that they write their own songs—good. No answer can be found about the album's title—bad. Google says they gave up their schoolgirl uniforms five years ago—OK.

Pressing play, the revelations begin. Twelve songs, a figure very familiar to Western audiences. Then the production hits you in the face like a freshly-baked pie. Where is the typical Japanese overproduction? Their new sound is oddly fresh and raw: a mixture of '90s indie rock, and Mötley Crüe's first album; which was originally intended to be a demo. The credits reveal that all of the mix engineers on this album are Western. Could this be a play toward overseas markets? The songwriting follows suit: very-indie rock meets early-'80s metal, and it's actually as enjoyable as an American summertime backyard party. There's nothing too substantial, but it's amusing and relaxing enough to be a welcome distraction. The second track, "Stamp!" would sit nicely in the track listing of an early Weezer album, with its hammered power chords and dissonant two-note bends.

By the fifth song, "Sunday Drive," however, everything goes wishy-washy. Like a modern pop version of Iggy Pop's "Lust for Life" passed through a '60s filter, it just crumbles like leftover oatmeal; having made a play so thoroughly that it's completely sapped of its purpose and flair.

The young ladies try to pick things up musically on the next track ("Konya wa Pizza Party") but the insipid lyrics remind the listener of why so many Westerners see Japanese music as a joke. Singing about "fantastic" pizza and "amazing taste" while mimicking the voice of an elementary school girl won't bestow to you artistic credibility. "Hebun na Kibun" conveys the vibe of Cracker's "I Hate My Generation," but the lyrics leave only vague emotional impressions, prompting the listener to grasp at the point. Throughout the rest of this album, Scandal go back and forth from possibly pointless to vaguely motivational lyrics. It doesn't get better musically either, as they waffle between cheerleader-pop, and old-school Radiohead-style jams, unable to commit either way.

They close the album with an English version of "Your Song" from their previous album, whose hook is almost directly stolen from Green Day's "American Idiot" and whose lyrics consist of vaguely motivational clichés. As the last words "Just believe and keep moving on" hit your ears, one is left feeling grateful that it ended on a good note, but knowing that it's not worth revisiting this recording.

**Yellow out now.**

Picking up Scandal's new album *Yellow* brings up a lot of questions. Are they corporate Muppets? Is the new album's title a play on the racist view of

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# RYU MATSUYAMA

Photo by Edo Chan

Ryu: Vocals, piano (27)  
 Tsuru: Bass, chorus (24)  
 Jackson: Drums, chorus (28)

## Melodic meets ambient

BY DAVI AZEVEDO

A power trio that brings an extraordinary mix of piano, band, and drums, Ryu Matsuyama has a unique sound that can be classified as “ambient pop.” This is a style that pulls the listener into its deep melodies, and the dialogues between rhythm and vocals. The result of this mix of elements is an invitation to a unique world, a place to experience different emotions through the lyrics and choruses.

It's been a long time since any contemporary band has sucked me in as deeply as has Ryu Matsuyama. I had to know more, so I reached out to the group's singer-songwriter and pianist Ryu to learn what drives the band and their music.

### How did the band get started?

I was born and grew up in Italy, where I lived for 20 years. In 2010, I moved to Tokyo and started my solo career. In 2012, I wanted to form a band and held some auditions. That's how I met Tsuru [bass]. Tsuru is from Kagoshima and the only “real” Japanese person in the band. He was greatly influenced to pursue music by his parents, and because of this, he started playing bass when he was 10 years old. In 2014, Tsuru and I decided to search for a drummer on Twitter. We found Jackson, who was born

in Tokyo and was just returning from Boston, where he studied music at the Berklee College of Music. After he noticed the tweet and heard our music, he decided to join the band.

### Who are your major influences?

We are influenced by many artists. For example, my favorite artists are Patrick Watson, Thom Yorke, and Kudanz. Tsuru's reference as bassist is Will Lee. Jackson is a really eclectic and dynamic drummer, and his references are Bob Marley, Steely Dan, and Yamashita Tatsurō. We have completely different musical backgrounds, interests, and personalities, but we believe this is the strength of the band. There's always something new to discover in each other.

### What inspired you to make music together?

We believe that making music is like painting on a white canvas. When we put together our experiences, music backgrounds, ideas, and feelings, it's something like a connection. We have different characters—but in a positive way. With these different colors, we try to realize landscapes that nobody has seen before.

### Who writes the lyrics? How do you compose the songs?

The lyrics and the songs are written by me. We usually go to the studio and introduce the first idea. Then, little by little, we start adding

elements and rhythm to the songs. It's like a jam session where everybody is free to put [in] their ideas and feelings.

### How many albums have you recorded? Where can people find your songs?

On October 18, 2015, we released our first nationally-distributed mini album, *Grow from the Ground*. We have another mini album, *Thinking Better*, that was released in 2014. Both are available for purchase in CD stores like Tower Records and also online at iTunes and Amazon.

### How would you like to be remembered by the public?

We sing almost all the songs in English. We want people to imagine beyond the lyrics, that they start their own journey with our music. That's maybe how we would like to be remembered.

### Any upcoming shows?

We do live shows every month, so please feel free to visit our website for additional information and live schedule. Also follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and check our videoclips on YouTube. We hope you enjoy our music and also [to] meet you in our shows.

<http://ryumatsuyama.com>

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## Finding ways to exercise in Tokyo

BY THOMAS BEECHER

**E**stablishing a fitness regime after winter hibernation can be grueling. It's tough enough getting out of bed on those cold mornings, let alone making an effort to stay fit. Yes, we're all lazy creatures for three months of the year, and that's why they invented Netflix. But it's warm now, so you're plum out of excuses.

Fortunately, there's an endless supply of fitness options in Tokyo that cater to all styles and budgets. So whether you're dusting off your sneakers for a jog or looking to push yourself that extra mile, *Metropolis* wants to help you perk up and get into shape.

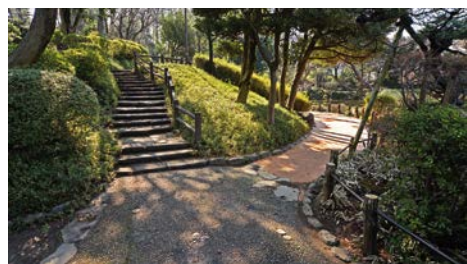


Photo by Thomas Beecher

### RUNNING

Getting fit can be as easy as setting your alarm clock an hour earlier and hitting the streets for a morning jog. OK, perhaps "easy" isn't the right word. But the more you make jogging a part of your routine, the more pleasurable it becomes.

Tokyo is a jogger's paradise. Its abundance of accessible public spaces makes the city a perfect place for outdoor fitness, whether you're a resident or a visitor. Your best bet is to pick out a local park, which usually offers idyllic scenery and well-maintained paths.

Those in the Minato area might consider checking out the quaint Arisugawa Park in Hiroo, which offers around one kilometer's worth of rugged yet impeccably manicured running space. The path snakes around a large man-made pond and waterfall, over a series of rustic wooden bridges, and past the Tokyo Metropolitan Library, which is located at the back of the park. Go early for maximum serenity.

Larger parks are, of course, a popular choice for joggers, and none come larger than Yoyogi. The park encompasses a vast swath of central-Tokyo real estate, so there's no shortage of paths to jog along. It's also home to the



must-visit Meiji Shrine.

Another noteworthy spot in central Tokyo is the grounds around Akasaka Palace, with a three-kilometer path surrounding the regal edifice. A further kilometer east is the Imperial Palace in Chiyoda, where you'll find people jogging at all hours of the day, with 10 kilometers' worth of runner-friendly sidewalk that takes you around the imposing palace moat.

**Arisugawa Park.** Nearest station: Hiroo.  
**Yoyogi Park.** Nearest station: Harajuku. **Akasaka Place.** Nearest station: Aoyama-itchome.  
**Imperial Palace.** Nearest station: Otemachi

### PERSONAL TRAINING

There's no short supply of good quality gyms in Tokyo, with many open 24 hours. However, most require fixed membership plans, which can be costly.

If you're looking for personal training, Club 360 in Roppongi offers a diverse selection of private and group classes, and lets you pay as you go. Club 360 is a great option for those who enjoy, or feel the need for, the structure and motivation of a personal trainer. Their studio, impressively large for downtown Tokyo, is more than your run-of-the-mill gym, decked out with all manner of training equipment to get you moving.

Options include one-on-one personal training (¥10,000 per class), group personal training



Courtesy of Club 360

(¥4,000-5,000), or weekly classes (¥4,000 / ¥35,000 per month for unlimited access). All their instructors speak English.

Classes include yoga, core and cardio, Shinkyokushin karate, and an outdoor fitness "boot camp," which is held each Monday and Friday morning in Arisugawa Park. The studio also provides massages (¥8,000-14,000) and physiotherapy (¥7,000-12,000), with the added benefit of accepting international insurance.

Club 360 has also developed a reputation for boxing.

As well as various boxing and kickboxing classes, they host Executive Fight Night, an annual charity event where mostly foreign, Tokyo-based office workers hang up their neckties and take to the ring to spar fellow salarymen—for charity—in front of a roaring audience of 500-plus.

**Club 360.** CMA3 Bldg. B1, 3-1-35 Motoazabu, Minato-ku. Nearest station: Roppongi. Tel: 03-6434-9667. E-mail: [info@club360.jp](mailto:info@club360.jp). [www.club360.jp](http://www.club360.jp).

**Executive Fight Night.** May 20, 2016. For tickets, visit [www.executivefightnight.com](http://www.executivefightnight.com).



### SWIMMING

If swimming is more your speed, you needn't travel too far to find a decent pool in Tokyo. Municipal gyms are a good choice, as they're usually quite affordable and have a good variety of indoor fitness options and decent pools.

One such center is the Katsushika City Sogo Sports Center in East Tokyo, which is popular among paddlers of all ages. The center has two heated indoor pools, as well as a summer-only outdoor "flowing water" pool (¥100-300 for two-hour access). There are also numerous terrestrial activities on offer, including an archery range and several ball courts.

**Katsushika City Sogo Sports Center.** 7-17-1 Okudo, Katsushika-ku. Nearest station: Aoto. Tel: 03-3691-7111. [www.spo-katsushika.es-forta.jp/english.html](http://www.spo-katsushika.es-forta.jp/english.html).





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## ADVERTORIAL

# Nihonbashi Cherry Blossom Festival

Tokyo doesn't come much better than in springtime. The city comes alive and welcomes the much cherished *sakura* (cherry blossoms).

There is arguably no better place to experience this than Nihonbashi. The area is a favorite among Tokyoites during the Nihonbashi Cherry Blossom Festival with popular tree-watching spots, including "sakura scenery" from all of Japan's 47 prefectures.

Numerous shops will light up in beautiful sakura colors, and along the vibrant and historical Nihonbashi Sakura Dori, an immersive projection mapping show on Naka Dori called "Nihon Sakura Kaze Kaido" wraps you in the authentic feeling of sakura season through light and music, as if the cherry blossoms are snowing down upon you.

Through April 10, experience The Best of Japan Gourmet Tour, at Coredo Muromachi, where you can sample traditional Japanese foods, facilitated by an English-speaking guide. If you post photos on social media you will receive 50 percent off the Tour.

Between April 4 and 10, patrons over the age of 18 are invited to wet their whistles during the Nihonbashi Sakura Bar. Eighty stores take part in this highly-anticipated drinking event, with advance tickets selling fast (¥2,900 in advance; ¥3,100 via web on day of event; ¥3,300 at the door). The party then continues with the 4th Annual Nihonbashi Area Sake Walk & Taste Tour (advance tickets ¥2,500; regular price ¥3,000), where you can drink as much sake as you want from across Japan.

Patrons get a rare chance to see sakura in style, with sakura-themed transportation options including the Sakura Bus, Sakura Rickshaws, and, for its maiden voyage, the Sakura Boat.

**Nihonbashi Cherry Blossom Festival. Through Apr 10.** Mitsukoshimae or Shin-Nihonbashi. [www.nihonbashi-tokyo.jp/en/sakura2016](http://www.nihonbashi-tokyo.jp/en/sakura2016). Omotenashi Nihonbashi: [www.nihonbashi-info.jp/omotenashi](http://www.nihonbashi-info.jp/omotenashi)





## ADVERTORIAL

# NATURE RIGHT NEXT DOOR

## Wonders await you in Chiba

**T**okyo is known for its hustle and bustle, but the area surrounding the metropolis is surprisingly tranquil and filled with adventure. Of the four prefectures that border Tokyo, perhaps none is more accommodating than Chiba.

In fact, many seasoned travelers and long-term residents would agree that the prefecture is one of nature's best kept secrets. Though best known for its accessibility to some of Japan's most iconic urban facilities, Chiba is more than just the gentle, reserved neighbor that many Tokyoites see it as.

If you take a trip to the prefecture's southwest corner, you can get in touch with its rich natural beauty and peer into Japan's spiritual past.

### Mount Nokogiri

Forming the boundary between the Awa and Kazusa areas of the Bōsō Peninsula is Mount Nokogiri, a steep, verdant mountain that lies on the southern border of the city of Futtsu and the town of Kyonan.

Upon first glance, the mountain's distinct, serrated ridge is fascinating. The unique shape is attributed to its history as a stone quarry—during the Edo Period, Mount Nokogiri served as a production area for stones used for construction—and is the source of its name. Mount Nokogiri literally means “Mount Sawtooth” in English, and the mark of its history is picturesquely evident to this day.

### The Nokogiriyama Ropeway

The traditional route for scaling the 329-meter mountain starts in Kanaya, a town on the eastern coast of Tokyo Bay. The trail should get you to the mountaintop in an hour on foot.

Alternatively, you can save time and energy by taking the Nokogiriyama Ropeway, which will take you directly to the summit. Since its establishment in 1962, the ropeway has been adored by locals and visitors alike, and attracts tourists throughout the year.

The ropeway starts in Futtsu, at the southern end of Tokyo Bay, and runs all the way to the top of the mountain. The ride takes around 3-5 minutes and the fare is ¥500 one-way or ¥930 both directions (¥250 and ¥450 for kids 6-11). The view of Tokyo Bay descending into the distance is a sight not to be missed, and the sheer comfort of the cable car doesn't hurt either.



Once you make it to the top, you'll see a narrow stone balcony hanging over a high cliff. This observation point is named “*jigoku-nozoki*,” or “glimpse into Hell,” and offers a breathtaking 360-degree panoramic view spanning from Tokyo Bay to the Miura Peninsula and, on a very clear day, to the Izu Peninsula and even Mount Fuji.

### Nihon-ji

From the mountaintop, a short walk down the southern slope will bring you to the historic Nihon-ji Temple complex, where venerable Buddhist statues reside in harmony with nature.

Founded by Emperor Shōmu during the Nara Period (710-794), Nihon-ji is one of the oldest Buddhist temples in Japan, and a very valuable cultural property. Statues stand side-by-side in the complex, and include a representation of the Niōmon, or entrance gate, along with the Kongōrikishi, the guardians who traditionally protect it.

There is also a colossal statue of Yakushi Nyorai, the buddha of medicine and healing. At 31 meters tall, it's the largest pre-modern stone carving of the Buddha, even taller than the



famous statues in Kamakura and Nara's Tōdai-ji.

Another impressive statue to be seen is a 30-meter depiction of Hyakushaku Kannon (Buddhist Goddess of Mercy and Compassion), which was built after World War II to pay tribute to fallen soldiers.

Mount Nokogiri, the Nokogiriyama Ropeway, and Nihon-ji are just some of the wonders to be found in Chiba. Get out of the city this weekend and go explore the wondrous nature that awaits you right next door.

### Access Info

Take the JR Uchibo Line to Hamakanaya Station. From Tokyo Station, the trip takes close to two hours. For quicker access, consider using the Tokyo-Wan Ferry, which runs between the Port of Kurihama in Yokosuka and the Port of Kanaya in Futtsu. The ferry crosses Tokyo Bay in about 40 minutes, and departs once every 30-50 minutes depending on the season. The Nokogiriyama Ropeway is a 10- to 15-minute walk from either Hamakanaya Station or the ferry port.

**For more information about Chiba, visit**  
<http://japan-chiba-guide.com/en/>  
[www.facebook.com/Japan.Tourism.Chiba](https://www.facebook.com/Japan.Tourism.Chiba)





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Toy Story Zoetrope, 2005. ©Disney/Pixar



Jerome Ranft. Joy, *Inside Out*, 2015.  
Cast urethane resin and plastic.  
©Disney/Pixar

# PIXAR: 30 YEARS OF ANIMATION

BY C.B. LIDDELL

The Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo is normally a quiet and sparsely attended venue. This is because of the Japanese public's tepid interest in most modern art, and the venue's relative distance from a convenient rail or subway station.

But it's a different story right now, thanks to the present exhibition "Pixar: 30 Years of Animation," which looks back over the history of the trailblazing computerized animation company behind such hits as *Finding Nemo*, *Toy*

*Story*, *Monsters, Inc.*, *Cars*, *Ratatouille*, *Wall-E*, and others. Instead of quietly echoing galleries, there is now a bit of a bustle about the place, with fans of animation thronging the show to find out the secret of Pixar's success.

Of course, there are two elements to this: the medium and the message. Starting as Graphics Group, a section of the computer division of Lucasfilm, before launching as a separate company in 1986 with Steve Jobs as its majority shareholder, Pixar was the first big effort to capitalize on the possibilities of computers to generate increasingly lifelike imagery. It's now part of The Walt Disney Company.

For those interested in the technical side, there is much here. In particular, there's a very effective video—featuring Lotso Bear from *Toy Story 3*—that shows how a scene changes with each computer animation treatment, as first the crude movements are mapped out, after which they are refined, down to each hair on the



Ralph Eggleston. Sequence Pastel: Field Trip  
*Finding Nemo*, 2003. Pastel on paper. ©Disney/Pixar



Ricky Nierva. Mike Color Studies. *Monsters, Inc.*, 2001  
Marker and pencil on photocopy. ©Disney/Pixar



Harley Jessup, layout by Enrico Casarosa. Colorsript Study: Remy Makes  
*Ratatouille*, 2007. Digital painting. ©Disney/Pixar

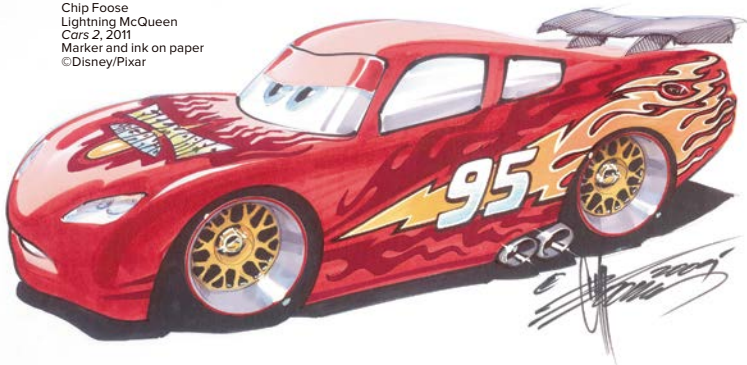
bear's fur being controlled by its own equation. Mind-boggling, but all possible thanks to the enormous advances in computer technology during the lifetime of the company!

One of the criticisms made of computer animation is that it lacks the human touch, as if an army of CGI programmers slaving away over oodles of code is somehow inhuman. Well, maybe just a little.

To refute such an impression, the show does



Chip Foose  
Lightning McQueen  
Cars 2, 2011  
Marker and ink on paper  
©Disney/Pixar



Bob Pauley  
Woody and Buzz  
Toy Story, 1995  
Marker and pencil  
on paper  
©Disney/Pixar

much to show the more analogue inputs of the creative process. This isn't too hard to do because, before things get too technical, the creative process is not dissimilar to the way the old Disney Company got projects started back in its golden age, with actual sketches and studies of the characters and the settings.

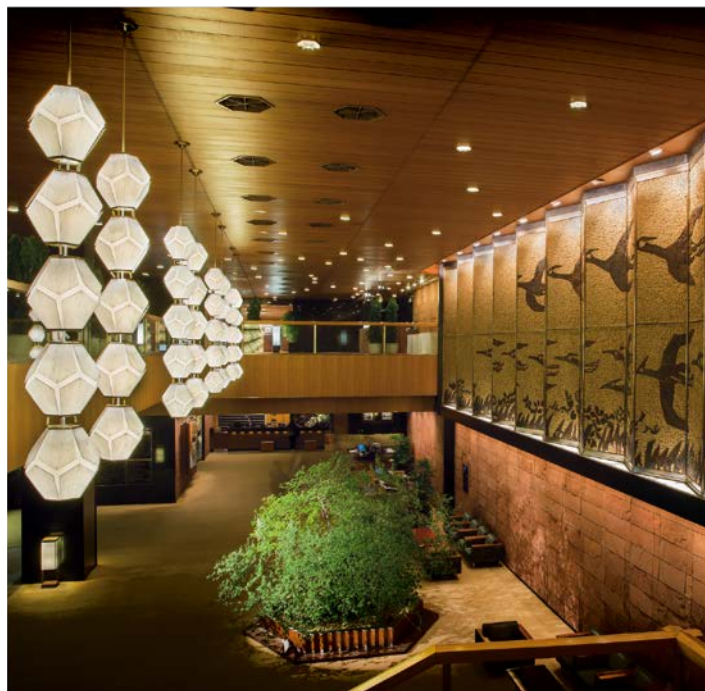
The exhibition features plenty of this conceptual artwork, allowing us to see that the original Buzz Lightyear character from *Toy Story* was originally envisioned as a much pudgier character rather than the more "macho" figure with which we are now all familiar.

The exhibition also features lots of urethane resin models of the various characters, showing the final agreed form. These are used as reference works by the animators to resolve any issues, and, in a sense, these are the souls of the characters.

The exhibition's highlight is the Zoetrope, or "Wheel of Life." This is a complex three-dimensional merry-go-round, featuring characters from *Toy Story* in various poses. When it spins at high speed and under strobe lights, the various poses of the characters blend together to give the illusion of movement, while the wheel itself seems to be stationary—an uncanny anime version of the philosophical concept of the "unmoved mover."

Whatever the medium of art—computer graphics or hand-drawn—the message is still key. The models, drawings, and visual installations on show here demonstrate that it is raw imaginary input, along with constant informed feedback, that has been the driving force behind Pixar's success.

**Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo. Until May 29. <http://j.mp/pixar30years>**



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T O K Y O



## SEVEN

Real stories of women's struggles find life on stage

BY MARTIN LEROUX

While stories about human rights abuse increasingly dominate mainstream media channels, firsthand accounts from individuals who have been impacted by it are not as often heard or broadcast.

The stage play *Seven* puts the focus on the real-life experiences of seven women from different countries. The show, classified as a “documentary play,” takes interviews with these women verbatim and renders them into monologues and scenes.

“Most people are not familiar with this play. It’s relatively new, and most people don’t see it as a typical play: it’s monologues by seven women that are patched together,” says Rachel Walzer, director of Black Stripe Theater’s upcoming production of *Seven*. “The women don’t relate to each other. It’s not a story about seven women; it’s seven stories that happen to be spoken in different places.”

Written by seven women playwrights in collaboration with the characters’ real-life counterparts, *Seven* addresses such topics as domestic abuse, poverty, rape, and the marginalization of women. The stories within feature the likes of a Russian woman who founded the first domestic abuse hotline in her country when there was no support for victims; an Afghan activist whose life was threatened because she delivered medical aid to women who were oppressed under Taliban rule; a Nigerian woman who is helping provide impoverished young women with education and opportunities; and a Pakistani woman who was gang raped, brought her rapists to justice, and improved conditions for women in her community.

Walzer explains that, while these women come from different countries, cultures, and religions, their stories share some unifying factors.

“The common denominator is that they suffered horribly simply because they are women in their societies, or because they’re poor women in their societies. They were abused, their rights were abused ... The other common

denominator—and this is what makes them all heroes—is that they were victims but eventually they overcame their victimhood, and they became leaders and educators in their own communities.”

Premiered in New York in 2008, *Seven* has been performed internationally over the years, from Sweden and Argentina to Nigeria and India, and the script has been translated into 25 languages.

While many productions of *Seven* are performed as a series of read or spoken monologues, Black Stripe’s production aims to tell the women’s stories more vividly through scenes that incorporate music, dance, and other art forms. After most performances, the production crew and cast will also hold discussions to share thoughts and ideas with the audience about the issues.

“It’s not a typical play. It’s based on these seven patchy monologues, and we’re adding

Photos by Rodger Sonomura



visuals and sound to it,” Walzer explains. “If people come with that understanding—it’s monologues that have been enhanced—I feel they will walk out intrigued and hopefully satisfied.”

“Having different actors, music, [and] dancers creates a connection, not just with the audience but between the different situations,” says Sarajeana Rossitto, who is producing Black Stripe’s *Seven* as well as acting in it. “The universality is the underlying thing about any human rights issue. But it’s easy to say, ‘That’s their culture. That’s the way people think in that society. I wash my hands [of it]; it has nothing to do with me.’”

Rossitto also addresses the pertinence of performing *Seven* in Japan, stating that the struggles present in the seven women’s countries also exist domestically, albeit in a different way.

“Compared to the other topics, [domestic abuse is] something that people have heard about but don’t actually know about in Japan,” states Rossitto. She also comments on Japan’s limitations on freedoms of speech and assembly, experienced by the woman in Nigeria; limited access to obstetricians and gynecologists for women in rural Japan; and human trafficking, an issue explored in a scene describing a Cambodian woman’s fight against sex trafficking in her country. “Every

topic, we can find a connection.”

While the play explores heavy subject matter, Walzer hopes that audiences can take away positivity and have important conversation.

“I hope people in that theater appreciate the artistic presentation of the show; however, not leave the theater thinking they saw a show,” the director states. “I’d like them to leave the theater feeling that they’ve just been in a conversation with people who have shared the most raw, honest experiences in their lives ... I’d like audiences to feel they could be asking questions, igniting more of the topic, and, cliché, but do something about it. Or empathize in a way that things can improve in your own family, or out there in the world.”

**Black Stripe Theater presents *Seven*. Apr 14-15, 7:30pm; Apr 16-17, 2 & 7:30pm. ¥3,500-4,000. Trance Mission Theater, Yoyogi 4-50-8, Shibuya-ku. ☎ Sangubashi. [www.blackstrip-theater.com](http://www.blackstrip-theater.com)**



# THE CULT OF SILVER

BY SAMUEL THOMAS



Silver jewelry may be everywhere in the world, with most cultures finding some way to bend, smelt, or carve the precious metal into some form to adorn the body—mainly because it looks cool. Ironically, Japan as a country has very little history of silver jewelry, despite it being one of the few precious metals the country is—or was—rich in. Apart from usages in tobacco pouches, *kanzashi*, and beads, the material stayed far from the body. There were few usages for jewelry such as rings, necklaces, and bracelets until the Meiji Period, when the proverbial floodgates opened.

Japan made up for lost time to become the leader in silver jewelry worldwide, particularly for men's accessories. A staggering number of publications are released on a regular basis, with titles as unambiguous as *Silver Accessory Style* and *Street Accessories*. Despite some of the popular labels coming from abroad, the lion's share of the market is made up of domestic brands; and honestly, many of the international brands enjoy very minor niche status at best in their own country, with the bulk of the sales in Japan.

So how did Japan become such a mecca for silver jewelry? For that, you have to rewind to the legend of [Goro Takahashi](#), now regrettably not with us. Born in 1939 in Tokyo, he entered cultural consciousness in post-war occupied Japan, enchanted by the Native American designs that the American soldiers brought with them. At the age of 16, he received leather-working tools from an American soldier and quickly set about building a business for himself in the Ameyoko

tribes. Takahashi became particularly close to the Lakota tribe, and was the first non-Lakota person to take part in the "Sun Dance" ritual. He therefore received the title "Yellow Eagle" -- the eagle being the bird of the east, and yellow the color of the east on the medicine wheel.

Returning to Japan in the 1970s, he found not only a growing demand for imported American silver jewelry, but also the market for his own. In 1972, he moved his shop to the same spot on Omotesando-dori where it still

area of Ueno. His love for leatherwork took him, in time, to America to see actual Native American jewelry, and to learn the craft for himself from various

stands today. He became the first officially sanctioned Native American-style silversmith on Japanese soil, and brought home the business spirit he learned from his time in America. Even as Japan entered its economic boom years, he refused to mass-produce his work, selling direct to customers, only allowing five customers into the shop at a time, and even refusing to sell an item if either he or his staff thought it didn't match the individual.

In the Harajuku outside Goro's, silver jewelry started to spread like wildfire with customers who couldn't wait to queue up outside for the chance to buy a single bead, fueling the fire for Native American silver jewelry. By the mid 1980s, it was the bikers' turn to take center stage, with American-based designers such as Bill Wall and Nagy Gabor storming the market with crude

chiseled masculine designs that continue to be cult collectables to this very day.

However, it was Richard Starks' Los Angeles-based Chrome Hearts in the 1990s that was next to capture the general public's imagination, with a luxury gothic aesthetic that remains a Harajuku mainstay. It was designer Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons who originally gave Chrome Hearts its start in Japan, selling the work in her Aoyama flagship before it became the toast of Tokyo, not just among the fashion elite and the rock stars who could afford the real deal, but traded second-hand on the backstreets of Harajuku and faked for high-school kids on Takeshita-dori.

It was the generation raised on the ubiquity of Chrome Hearts who are the real heroes to pick up the mantle of Goro, who, like the legend himself, were not content to just enjoy what was coming out of America, but were inspired to remake it in their own image. As the '90s blurred into the '00s, more and more character began to come out of Japan's domestic scene, with brands like Wolfman BRS, who started working closely in Chrome Hearts' shadow, standing tall as equals with their own distinct character.

Now, shops like Harajuku's Silver Shield, Gintoki, and Bizarre are home to the domestic scene. The back pages of various silver magazines are teeming with listings of shops all over Tokyo, such as Ikebukuro's Black Barts and Koenji's Emerge, which stock only brands from Japan. Tastes at the moment have taken a turn towards traditional Japanese imagery, but futuristic designs seem to be the frontier unexplored, with Wagaraku and Glam Scale in particular capturing the mood of the moment with mechanical designs that look as good with a suit as with jeans.



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## AMERICAN HOUSE

📍 Harajuku

Modeled after a 1970s Brooklyn diner, American House was established in the Motomachi district of Yokohama in 1978. Here you can enjoy one of America's favorite foods in an atmosphere reminiscent of downtown New York in the 1970s. The patties are made of 100-percent fresh Australian beef, grilled on natural lava rocks, and served on original, subtly sweet hamburger buns. The most popular item is the "Juicy Lucy," a burger stuffed with three layers of cheddar cheese from Minneapolis, Minnesota. Top it all off with a great dessert of New York-style Cheesecake and take in live music every night.

✉ Mention *Metropolis* for a ¥200 discount on the Garlic Mushroom Jucy Lucy (until the end of May)

1F Cascade Harajuku, 1-10-37 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku.  
Tel: 03-6721-1621. Mon-Fri 11am-11pm (L.O. 10pm).  
📠 Harajuku or Meiji-jingumae. E-mail: ameha-harajuku@americanhouse.co.jp. www.americanhouse-harajuku.com



## HARD ROCK CAFE

📍 Various

A contemporary, cutting-edge atmosphere that will take you right back to America with displays such as guitars used by famous musicians, stage costumes, handwritten lyrics, photos, and more. One hundred-percent American beef, special buns, carefully selected ingredients, and a proven recipe for the taste and volume of real American burgers is at the center of what makes the Hard Rock Cafe a burger paradise. Try the Original Legendary Burger (¥1,980) or the Mushroom & Swiss Burger (¥2,380), 240-gram beef patty with two slices of Swiss cheese and plenty of sautéed mushrooms. Feeling festive? Grab a Fiesta Burger (¥2,280), 240-gram beef patty with fresh jalapeño salsa, Monterey Jack, guacamole, and pico de gallo that will create a party in your mouth! Plus, check out the Hard Rock Cafe's monthly special menus, and grab a drink during Happy Hour—weekdays, 4pm to 6pm (only in Tokyo)!  
**Tokyo Branch:** 5-4-20 Roppongi, Minato-ku.  
Sun-Thu 11:30am-2am, Fri & Sat 11:30am-4am. Tel: 03-3408-7018. 📠 Roppongi. http://hardrockjapan.com



## ARMS

📍 Various

Faithful to the U.S. right down to the imported paint, Arms' wooden decor is opened out to the park during summer months. And the space is newly renovated—almost twice as large as before! Enjoy light, fluffy patties served with minced toppings, and a bun made with natural yeast. The Avocado Mushroom Cheese Burger (¥1,393) and the Popeye Burger (¥1,188) are top picks, and you can even grab a burger to go from Arms Park Side, conveniently located right by Yoyogi Park. Come and enjoy your burger with a perfect park view!

✉ Nab a set drink for ¥216 from 11am to 4pm on weekdays. Brunch Sat, Sun, & hols 8-10:45am

**Yoyogi:** 5-64-7 Yoyogi, Shibuya-ku. E-mail: arms@utopia.ocn.ne.jp. Tel: 03-3466-5970. Open Tue-Fri 11am-11pm, closed Mon (except hols), Sat-Sun & hols 8-10:45am (Brunch Time) 11am-11pm. 📠 Yoyogi-Kōen. For more info on Arms Picnic in Shinjuku and Takeout & Delivery in Tomigaya, visit www.arms-burger.com.



## JACK37BURGER


📍 Various

Having honed his skills working at Firehouse Burger, a famous burger place ranked number one on the Zagat survey for best burgers in Japan, the owner of Jack37Burger has created a relaxing atmosphere that includes vintage wooden furniture and counters. The secret behind Jack37Burger is the harmony of their original Indonesian sambal sauce, buns made of natural yeast, and a 100-percent natural beef patty. Enjoy lunch sets of a hamburger of your choice plus fries and a soft drink for ¥980-1,250 (weekdays only), and Happy Hour 5-7pm, when draft and bottled beer is just ¥380 (tax included).

✉ Free half beer for *Metropolis* readers!

16-16 Nihonbashi Kodenma-cho, Chuo-ku. Tel: 03-6884-1541. Open Mon-Tue & Thu-Fri 11am-3:30pm & 5-11pm, Wed 11am-3:30pm & 6-11pm, Sat 11:30am-9pm. 📠 Kodenma-cho, Bakuro-cho, Bakuroyokoyama, Higashi-nihonbashi. E-mail: jack37burger@gmail.com. www.jack37burger.com





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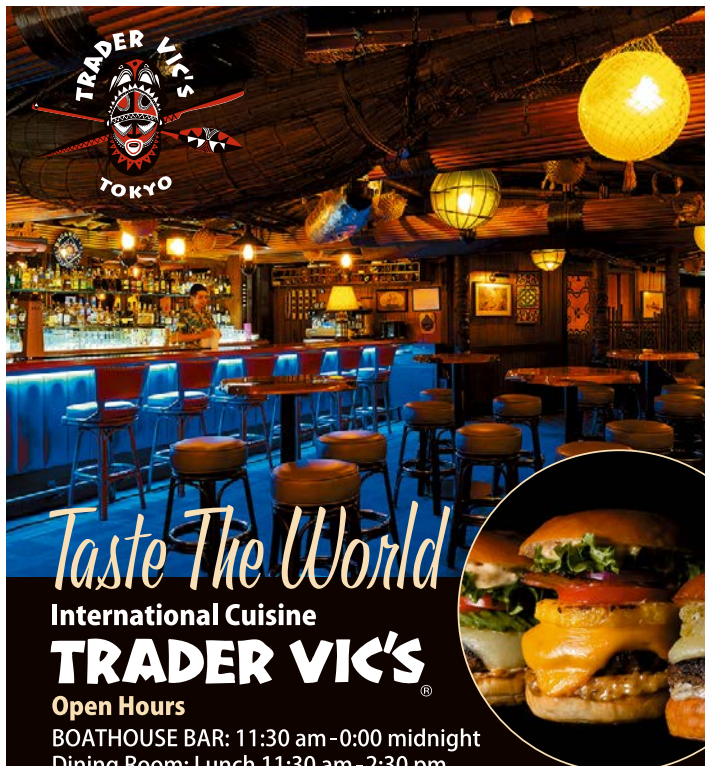
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[www.newotani.co.jp/tokyo/restaurant/vics/](http://www.newotani.co.jp/tokyo/restaurant/vics/)



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## THE OAK DOOR

♥ Grand Hyatt Tokyo, Roppongi

Designed by renowned designer Tony Chi, The Oak Door is a dramatic steakhouse featuring signature wood-burning ovens. The Oak Door features premium-quality meats and seasonal produce that come together to create perfectly-proportioned elements and meat textured to crumble when you bite into it. Savor gourmet creations such as The Oak Door Burger (shown on this issue's cover)—which comes in small (130g) and regular (220g)—as well as a range of seasonal burgers such as April's Salmon Burger, May's 1000g Giant Burger, and June's Chicago-style Hot Dog. The Oak Door also features an extensive list of New World wines that pair perfectly with your burger.

**6F Grand Hyatt Tokyo, 6-10-3 Roppongi, Minato-ku.**  
**Lunch 11:30am-2:30pm (weekends and national holidays till 3pm), Afternoon 3-5pm, Dinner 6-10pm.**  
**Tel: 03-4333-8784. E-mail: oakdoor@hyatt.com.**  
 ☞ Roppongi. <http://restaurants.tokyo.grand.hyatt.co.jp/oak-door-restaurant>



## OUTBACK STEAKHOUSE

♥ Roppongi

When it comes to a relaxing atmosphere for dining, few places can top the Australian outback—and that's a setting you can find right in the middle of Roppongi. With many booths that provide a private setting for your lunch or dinner, Outback Steakhouse Roppongi offers a menu featuring burgers made with 100-percent pure beef patties that are topped with just the right amount of lettuce and tomato, sandwiched by a large bun that keeps all the goodness in. Want to go beyond burgers? Try Outback's specialty: Slow-Roasted Prime Rib. Choose from three cooking styles: Original (brings out the flavor of the juicy roast beef); Seared; and Flame-grilled (for a smoky, bolder flavor). Offered on the weekend and at dinner time, every night in Roppongi. And don't miss Happy Hour at the Bar, Mon-Fri 5-7pm.

**Rocmon Bldg. 2F, 6-1-3 Roppongi, Minato-ku.**  
**03-5413-4870. Mon-Fri 5pm-11:30pm (L.O. 10:30pm),**  
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 ☞ Roppongi. [www.outbacksteakhouse.co.jp/en/](http://www.outbacksteakhouse.co.jp/en/)



## MUNCH'S BURGER SHACK

♥ Hamamatsucho

No matter your mood, Munch's Burger Shack is the place for you. Why? Because the two floors of this Hamamatsucho eatery each have a distinct flavor: calm on the first floor, lively on the second! Speaking of flavor, the Bacon Cheese Burger (¥1,500)—made with homemade smoked bacon—is to die for, with certified lean Angus beef from the U.S. that's handcut by the staff daily to make the freshest patties around with a fine balance. But if Angus beef isn't your thing, the Caesar Salad with Avocado and Bacon (¥1,380) and the Chicken Gumbo (¥650) are delicious alternatives. Wash it all down with American craft beers as well as Heineken, Guinness, Yona Yona Ale, and more.

☞ At lunch, get a meat dish with rice for ¥1,200, or add a drink to any meal for just ¥150

**1-2F I・Smart Bldg. 2-26-1 Shiba, Minato-ku. Tue-Fri 11am-3pm & 5:30pm-9pm, Sat 11am-9pm, Sun & hols 11am-4pm. Closed Mon. Tel: 03-6435-3166**  
 ☞ Hamamatsucho or Shibakoen. <http://munchs.jp>



## SASA GRILL BURGER CLUB

♥ Various

Like a Parisian backstreet with warm wood and the classic Continental aroma of tasty burgers, this is a delectable getaway in Daikanyama and Nakameguro. The secret is 100-percent hand-mixed *wagyu* patties, whole wheat buns made with natural yeast, and slow-cooked homemade onion sauce. A must-try is the grilled mushroom burger (¥1,390, limited number daily), available at the **Daikanyama** branch only. Burgers with homemade chili or mozzarella are also popular! Plus, you can pair your burger with beers from around the world.

☞ Get a free soft drink with any meal during weekday lunches (11am-4pm) at Daikanyama

**Daikanyama: 1F Daikanyama-Pocketpark Bldg., 2-21-15 Ebisunishi, Shibuya-ku. Mon-Sat 11am-10:30pm, Sun & hols: 11am-9:30pm. Closed every third Tue. Tel: 03-3770-1951. ☞ Daikanyama. Nakameguro: B1, Nakameguro GT Plaza Bldg., 2-1-1 Kami-Meguro, Meguro-ku. Mon-Fri: 10am-9pm, Sat, Sun & hols: 10am-8pm. Closed every third Tue. Tel: 03-3711-4449. ☞ Nakameguro. [www.hijiriya.co.jp](http://www.hijiriya.co.jp)**



## TGI FRIDAYS

♥ Various

If you're looking for an authentic experience right here in Japan, TGI Fridays is a must. The restaurant has exactly the same design as the original TGI Fridays in America. Enjoy 100-percent beef, 200-gram patties made using a recipe that's faithful to authentic American taste and topped with two kinds of cheese—cheddar and golden-fried mozzarella—and capped with crisp bacon on a toasted bun to deliver a volume and flavor that will sate your appetite for a taste of the familiar. The Cheesy Bacon Cheeseburger (¥1,990 plus tax) is a must! Want to go beyond burgers? TGI Fridays is also faithful to the American recipe for baby back ribs and steak. Great service from the friendly waitstaff and bartenders awaits you in this casual restaurant where you can experience America right here in Japan.

**Roppongi Plaza Bldg. 1F & 2F, 3-12-6 Roppongi, Minato-ku. Tel: 03-5412-7555. Mon-Thu, Sun & hols 11:30am-3am; Fri, Sat, day before hols 11:30am-5am. ☞ Roppongi. [www.tgifridays.co.jp](http://www.tgifridays.co.jp). Other locations within Tokyo: Harajuku, Ikebukuro, Shibuya, Shinagawa, Suidobashi, Ueno.**



## TRADER VIC'S

♥ Akasaka-mitsuke

Originally founded in San Francisco in 1937, Trader Vic's Tokyo opened its doors at The Hotel New Otani in 1974 with a tropical interior, exotic cocktails, pancakes, and original Trader Vic's international menu that has become famous in all 20 locations around the globe. The secret to Trader Vic's renowned burger is U.S. beef that is slowly cooked. Then the 225g moist and juicy patty is paired with a homemade bun. You can also enjoy this delicious creation with a great selection of Californian wines and tropical cocktails. And don't miss the traditional brunch buffet every Sunday and holiday from 11:30am to 2:30pm.

☞ Show this ad to receive a free soft drink or beer

**4F Hotel New Otani Garden Tower. 4-1 Kioichou, Chiyoda-ku. 03-3265-4707. Open Bar 11:30am-11:30pm, Dining 11:30am-2:30pm, 5pm-9pm. ☞ Akasaka-mitsuke. E-mail: t-vics@newotani.co.jp. [www.newotani.co.jp/tokyo/restaurant/vics/](http://www.newotani.co.jp/tokyo/restaurant/vics/)**





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**E-mail: [frontdesk@azabucourt.com](mailto:frontdesk@azabucourt.com). Mon-Fri 8am-8pm, Sat-Sun & Hols 8am-6pm. [www.azabucourt.com](http://www.azabucourt.com).  Hiroo.**



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**http://japt.co.jp  Gotanda.**



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**<http://tapol.gn.apc.org>, [www.papuansbehindbars.org](http://www.papuansbehindbars.org)**



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## ATTORNEY SHINSUKE NAGAYOSHI

For expert legal advice on issues ranging from immigration and accidents to inheritance, divorce, and more, contact Shinsuke Nagayoshi. He has helped foreigners in Japan who have been put in legally disadvantageous positions due to their inability to speak Japanese and lack of knowledge about Japanese customs and laws. He can provide legal services in Japanese, English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Chinese. Be sure your case is fully understood and in safe hands. **4F Ginza Fukada Bldg, 2-3-19, Ginza, Chuo-ku. Tel: 03-6264-4174 (English and Japanese). Fax: 03-5539-4701. E-mail: [infoenglish@shinsuke-nagayoshi.com](mailto:infoenglish@shinsuke-nagayoshi.com). Mon-Fri 10am-5pm. Dai-ichi Tokyo Bar Association. Sato-Hori Law Firm. <http://shinsuke-nagayoshi.com>  Ginza-itchome.**



MULTILINGUAL LEGAL ADVICE



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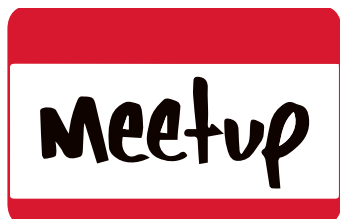
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## BEAUTY BY ALEXANDRE

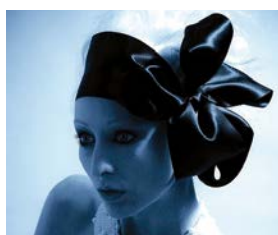
Alexandre started as a hairstylist and color specialist for blondes and brunettes in Paris 25 years ago. He moved to New York, and worked in Manhattan for more than 10 years at an upscale hair salon. For many years, he worked in the fashion industry for movies and TV (*VH1: Behind the Music*, *CBS News*, etc.), fashion shows (Lanvin, Nautica, etc.) and photography (*Vanity Fair*, *Teen People*, etc.), moving between Paris and New York, and now, Tokyo. He also specializes in make-up and body painting, and can provide make-up workshops for small groups at private homes. Alexandre understands that sometimes, people are unable to visit salons for cuts and styling, and so he is happy to make house-calls. By appointment only at home or at Lizerio in Omotesando. **Tel: 090-3520-6262.** [www.bba-japan.com](http://www.bba-japan.com).



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## SILVA PAPILO

English-speaking hairdresser Chie confers with her clients to help create the style they want, advising them on issues such as hair texture, color balance, and how facial structure and hairstyle will influence their overall "look." Chie, who specializes in ombre and blonde highlights, has extensive experience, which has resulted in her being recognized within the industry as an expert in total creative beauty styling. Featured in well-known publications like *GQ*, *ID*, *FHM*, and *Vogue*, she was even recommended by *Harper's Bazaar Australia* as the best hairstylist in Tokyo. **2F Galeria Harajuku, 3-6-1 Sendagaya, Shibuya-ku.** Tel: 03-6434-5219. Email: [contact@silvapapilio.com](mailto:contact@silvapapilio.com). Closed Monday and 3rd Sunday of the month. <http://silvapapilio.com>. ☎ Kitasando..



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## NORA HAIR SALON

Finding the right hair salon can be tough. You want someone who understands your non-Japanese hair, an atmosphere that's relaxing and unique, and a place that's open when you need it to be. Nora Hair Salon hits all the right notes with its spacious and fashionable high-sense space in Minami-Aoyama.

You can even bring your children along—no need to line up a sitter—and they might even spot one of the many celebrities who frequent the salon. **FROM-1st BF, 5-3-10 Minami-Aoyama, Minato-ku. Tel: 03-6419-9933. Mon-Fri 12am-10pm, Sat 11am-8pm, Sun 11am-7pm. http://kei8330.wix.com/norahairsalon** ☎ Omotesando.



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## UNION SQUARE NEW YORK

Welcome to Union Square, a new hair salon run by Mika. Mika spent 15 years as a creative hair stylist at a trendy salon in the East Village in NYC. One of her specialties is the "ultra straight" treatment—covered by the New York Times—which straightens without irons. You'll also be pampered with the Yume luxury shampoo chair and head spa. Until the end of April, get an ultra straightening, haircut and treatment for ¥20,000 plus tax (reservation necessary; regular ultra straightening [no cut/treatment] is ¥16,000-20,000 plus tax). Mika is happy to offer a free deep-conditioning treatment or scalp massage to first-time clients. **201 Kitamura 60, 5-16-1 Hiroo, Shibuya-ku. Tel: 03-6721-9980. Tue-Sat 11am-8pm, Sun 11am-6pm. http://unionsq-ny.tokyo** ☎ Hiroo.



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## KATAYAMA BUNZABURO SHOTEN

Opened in Kyoto in 1915, Katayama Bunzaburo Shoten focuses on creating traditional Japanese tie-dyed items. The concave-convex characteristics of the shibori technique of tie-dyeing achieve unique and sometimes even daring designs, fusing fashion and art into brand-new "wearable art." Because their items are sold in museums around the world, wearing a Katayama Bunzaburo Shoten creation is like clothing yourself in a piece of Japanese art history. Check online for more info about products, and the main store in Kyoto. **Ginza Main Store, 2F Ginza Frontier Bldg, 6-7-8 Ginza, Chuo-ku. Tel: 03-3573-3135. 11am-7:30pm; closed Mondays. http://bunzaburo.com/en.**



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## BDC PILATES

Broadway Dance Center, a 30-year veteran in training professional dancers, is happy to announce the grand opening of BDC Pilates in Omotesando-Minami-Aoyama in late April. It will be the first studio in Japan to focus on group reformer classes, and with a limit of six people per class, participants receive the full attention of the instructor. English-speaking instructors available. Private sessions also offered. Membership fee discount ¥30,000→free. Trial lesson ¥2,000. Located a 30-second walk from Omotesando Station. **5F, 5-6-24 Minami-Aoyama, Minato-ku, Tokyo. E-mail: info@bdcpilates.com (English OK). http://bdcpilates.com** ☎ Omotesando.



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## GAIJIN WIFE, GAIJIN LIFE

BY GRACE BUCHELE MINETA



Grace Buchele Mineta is an author who blogs and draws comics about her daily life in Japan at [www.HowIBecameTexan.com](http://www.HowIBecameTexan.com).

## HOROSCOPE

BY CATHRYN MOE

♥ Love ♣ Money ♠ Luck

### ARIES

Mar 21-Apr 20 ♥♥♥ ♣♣♣ ♠♠♠

April is the answer to March's undying. While March winds blew through your plans, April offers solace and energy. The month starts with the Sun and Mercury in your sign, and by week two Venus realizes you need comfort to luxuriate your efforts. If you burn through a few spa or beauty treatments, you're meant to. Mercury goes retrograde near the end of the month, so why not enjoy things now?

### TAURUS

Apr 21-May 21 ♥♥♥♥ ♣♣ ♠♠

The Sun moves into your sign this month. Happy birthday to you, Taurus! By all means, celebrate and make this a time to remember. Venus is in your solar twelfth house, bringing dreams of luxury, but not quite delivering. However, she's on course to prepare you, so make plans for the future. Your way there is being restored. All the better to remember as Mercury goes retrograde—in Taurus—near the end of April!

### GEMINI

May 22-Jun 21 ♥♥ ♣♣ ♠♠♠

April promises to begin as fast-paced as possible. Funny thing is, this month just keeps accelerating. Venus joins in on activities, meaning they're beautiful, delicious, luxurious, or all three! Mid-month is a time of breaking old rules and trying out new creativity. Remember this. You'll want to keep your memories safely wrapped up in satin and silk when Mercury goes retrograde near the end of the month.

### CANCER

Jun 22-Jul 23 ♥♥♥ ♣♣ ♠♠♠

If things felt heavy or damp in March, they'll lighten up and dry out in April. Not to say there won't be a few clouds drifting by your dreams, but Mars in your work sector has alerted Saturn—in the same area—that things will be changing. They're both retrograde mid-month, as is Mercury by late April. Bottom line: be patient with yourself. The pace is not your doing; it's others' ... and you know it.

### LEO

Jul 24-Aug 23 ♥♥ ♣♣ ♠♠♠

If you've had a particular relationship on your mind, April is the month you may almost hold it in your hand. Your romantic sector has two opposing energies transiting through it, so don't fret. On one hand, Mars makes a move towards Saturn, racing to be sexy and undo any obstacles. On the other, they're both retrograde by mid-month, which gives pause. Then Mercury goes retrograde later in April. It's a journey right now, not a destination.

### VIRGO

Aug 24-Sep 23 ♥♥♥ ♣♣ ♠♠♠

The constant tug you may have felt in March—if you weren't lucky enough to escape into a lovely fantasy realm, though not entirely advised—now begins to release its grip. April sees the dissipation of the planetary overwhelm that kept you hostage in some area of your life. The Sun transits to a fellow earth sign on April 20, putting things in perspective right before Mercury goes retrograde near the end of this month.

### LIBRA

Sep 24-Oct 23 ♥♥♥♥ ♣♣ ♠♠♠

Of all the zodiac signs, yours may have the most fun this month. April lightens where March dampened, and the watery downpours give way to rebirth in areas most welcome. The price to pay is not that great, as you have done your homework and paid an enormous amount of dues. Dark Moon Lilith in Libra opposes Venus late in April as Mercury goes retrograde. You can pretty much create your own new world.

### SCORPIO

Oct 24-Nov 22 ♥♥ ♣♣ ♠♠♠

You know what you're doing, in that you have taken a tried-and-true method and added elegance. So why are the rewards so slow in coming? Juno, the constant companion, is retrograde in your sign. This is not about you not "doing enough;" this is about taking time for yourself while others catch up. Vesta in your partnership sector will hold to what you have created. A burst of recognition is coming your way.

### SAGITTARIUS

Nov 23-Dec 22 ♥♥♥♥ ♣♣ ♠♠♠

Feel like you're becoming a Capricorn? Has "all work and no play" become your personal motto? Saturn, the ruler of Capricorn, is in your sign. You are responsibility par excellence. You're becoming known in your community or your field, dispelling the clouds of confusion that others weaved into your story. By the second week of April, Venus trines Sagittarius. You are in for romance and new excitement.

### CAPRICORN

Dec 23-Jan 20 ♥♥ ♣♣ ♠♠♠

All that mystery and confusion is swept away in April. The Sun starts the month in a revealing fire sign, meaning the insights and glimmers are to make your life easier. As Venus joins this area, there is an upleveling of comfort. Do allow yourself to sink into whatever sofa suits your fancy. Yes, Mars and Saturn are both retrograde by mid-month, and Mercury joins them later. But that doesn't mean you can't relax.

### AQUARIUS

Jan 21-Feb 19 ♥♥♥ ♣♣ ♠♠

You're in the home stretch—literally. Things that need to be taken care of at home—or finding a new one—reach an apex of energy in April. 'Digging out' is another way of putting it. Pallas Athene in your sign up-levels creative ventures, and Venus may bring positive financial news starting week two. Let April be a time where even Mercury retrograde, late month, cannot keep you from seeing the funny side of life.

### PISCES

Feb 20-Mar 20 ♥♥ ♣♣ ♠♠♠

Even as emotions threatened to crest overhead in March, April brings waves of comfort with a soothing taste of luxury. This is your star chart, regardless of other things that are continuously occurring. Additional income is featured with Venus entering your money sector during the second week. With Mercury moving retrograde the final week of the month, jump into possibilities and sort out the details later.





Illustration by Christi Rochin

hanging out in the bushes and beaches of eastern New South Wales.

As one would imagine, the contrast was absolutely staggering! This must be how John the Savage from *Brave New World* felt when he arrived at 26th-century London: desperate to try and integrate oneself in an environment that was futuresque and pristine, with everyone around dressed in their slick suits and dresses.

In fact, in the beginning, it was all a little too much for an introverted journalism major, who not too long ago was to-ing and fro-ing between the beaches and hinterland.

The sci-fi factor of Tokyo doesn't end with city's technological innovation and its futuristic metropolitan aesthetics; it's also embedded in

## STAIRWAY TO THE FUTURE

### Japan, I Hardly Knew You

BY AKIRA DAVIS



**M**y first encounter with the future began with an escalator.

It was my first day as an exchange student in Tokyo, and I got lost inside the university campus and was running late for an orientation. After going back and forth, I finally found the building that I needed to be in. Relieved, I zipped through the entrance gate to get to the third floor.

The moment of relief, however, was short-lived. As soon as I stepped into the entrance hall, I found myself staring blankly at the escalator in front of me. It was completely still, with no sign of activity.

At one point, I thought I was going mad.

Minutes felt like hours, but the escalator remained motionless.

With no staircase in sight, the elevators out of service, and a broken escalator, I wondered to myself, how will I get to the third floor? Will I get to the orientation on time?

Another couple of minutes later, a kind stranger had informed me that the escalator remains inactive until you step closer to it. It was this moment I learnt about the existence of "automatic escalator."

This was my first blush-making encounter with 21st-century Tokyo. It sure as hell wasn't the last one, but I shall save the other stories for another time.

After having spent over a decade living in a small coastal town in Australia, returning to Tokyo felt like I traveled forward—or is it back?—to the future. It was surreal to be walking along the streets of places like Roppongi, Omotesando, and Aoyama for the first time in ages; and to think that only a couple of weeks prior, I was

their communication style.

What fascinates me with the Japanese people is their near-psychic ability to understand each other without access to explicit information. This unique ability is called "*kuuki o yomu*," which literally translates to "reading the air," and is an essential skill for anyone to have who wants to communicate with Japanese people.

Although this depends on the individual, Japanese people tend to prefer to keep things to themselves. You need to be able to know 10 from hearing one, and deduce details even when only given part of the story.

Before I moved Down Under, I had actually lived in Tokyo for a long time. With 13 years of living in the city down my sleeve, as well as my language proficiency, I was quite confident that I knew Tokyo, its people, and its culture inside and out.

I couldn't have been more wrong. There's a lot more to Tokyo and Japan than I could ever imagine. It has been four years since the escalator incident, and though the initial bewilderment of the city has subsided, to live in a high-tech, sci-fi utopia full of psychics can still be a tad overwhelming from time to time.

But just like those automatic escalators, you need to take a step closer to actually get somewhere.



**WHAT FASCINATES ME WITH THE JAPANESE PEOPLE IS THEIR NEAR-PSYCHIC ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER WITHOUT ACCESS TO EXPLICIT INFORMATION."**

■ Akira Davis is an Australian Japanese, recently married, and is an editorial assistant for *Metropolis*.



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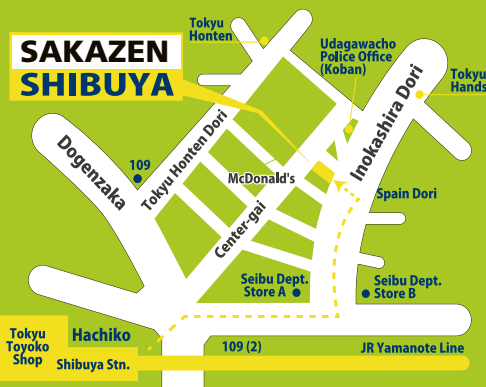
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